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Introduction by James Kelman

Foreword or Endword by Hugh

Recollections and Memoirs of a Brigton boy:

- Part 0ne (local history, family history & boyhood memories)
- Part Two (work and growing up, serving your time)
- Part Three (work and awareness, activism)
- Part Four (miscellaneous writings)

Appendix: facsimiles, letters, photographs

Footnotes

Commentary and memoirs by other people:

- *James McLaren*, by Leslie Forster
- *interviews with* Leslie Forster and Ned Donaldson
- *After the C.P.; a context*, by Tommy Gorman
- The Socialist Workers Federation, by Paul Foot
- The People's Palace by Elspeth King and/or Michael Donnelly

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Laureen,

Here's the book to look at.

We're having an event in Edinburgh (very. end)

Is Scott still at 23 Menylee Road? He told me he was moving to London possibly for a job ???

Derek

WITH COMPLIMENTS

T/SOR/1/5/2

JIM
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SPELT RORI

PAGE 8 AGE 71 WHEN PHOTO WAS TAKEN
PAGE 66 BRIAN IN PHOTO
PAGE 182 BARTLEY
PAGE 183 STILL PLAYED 2006 (CELTIC SONG)

Born up a Close

memoirs of a Brigton Boy

Hugh Savage
(1918 – 1996)
edited, annotated and with an introduction by
James Kelman

Argyll
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Blessed are those that expect nothing
because they won't be disappointed

Eugene Debs

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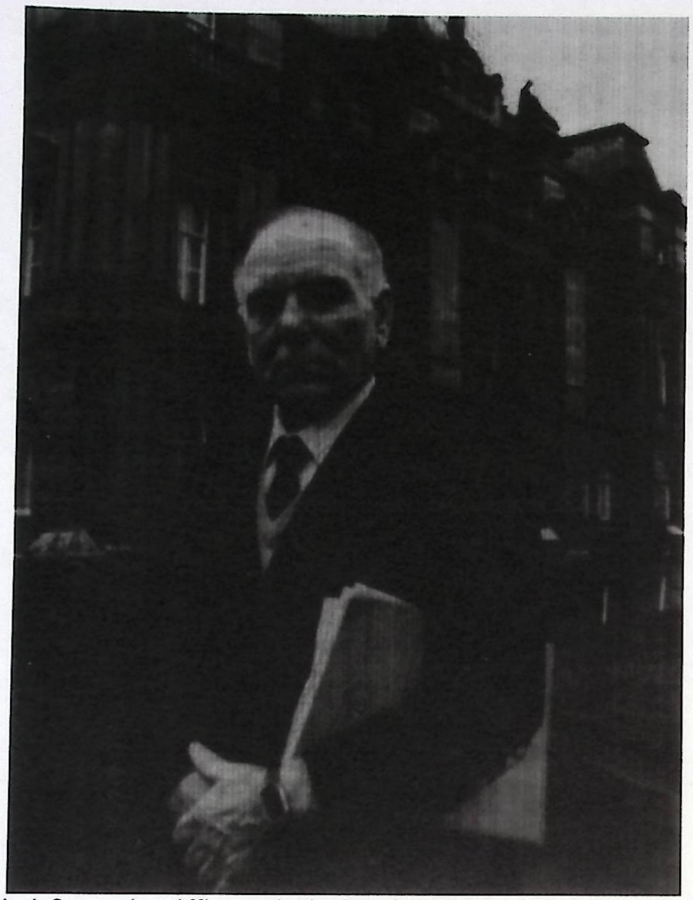

Hugh Savage (aged ??) outside the People's Place on Glasgow Green

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Introduction
James Kelman

I MET Hugh Savage on a picket line one Saturday morning in February 1990. It had been organised to protest an exhibition that ran for nine months and was central to Glasgow's year as European City of Culture.[1] The overall cost of 'Culture Year' to the people of the city was rumoured in the region of £50 million. Of course the people of the city had no say in the matter. The decision was taken by the political authorities in conjunction with their own advisors. 'The European City of Culture'! What a magnificent title! There was a glorious ring to it. How could Big Business fail to invest in such grandiosity? And private investment was the main objective. The media went along with it as did 'popular opinion'. Fun is always popular. This would be a year of fun. Opera, theatres, ballet, and art galleries: art with a capital 'a'. Plus popular entertainment: street celebrations and face painting for the masses. It all fits under 'culture'. Even the art was democratic; Pavarotti *and* Sinatra! Old Blue-eyes was a must, given he was the epitome of cool for most male politicians.

In 1990 £50 million was an extraordinary sum for a city to spend on a public relations exercise. A couple of years later Dublin held the title and their outlay was only £5 million. The political hierarchy of Glasgow would not discuss the finances. But when trapped into a comment their notion of culture was revealed as a peculiar confusion of taste, manners and etiquette. The media and arts establishment were content to allow the confusion. A year-long jamboree was what they wanted, plus whatever else was going on, or going out. Pavarotti and Sinatra did venture into the city, £1.6 million went out.

[1] See Hugh Savage's 'Campaigns' and the other essays and writings of *The Reckoning*, edited by Farquhar McLay [Clydeside Press 1990].

How to reconcile 'European City of Culture' with the notorious municipality whose relative rates of asbestos cancers, alcohol-related diseases; infant mortality rates, male mortality rates, and so on are a byword throughout Europe? It was a major public relations exercise. Thus the political authorities called in a major public relations company. Saatchi and Saatchi marketed Margaret Thatcher on behalf of the Tory Party and were now employed by Glasgow's Labour administration, and paid with money belonging to the people of the city. Business is business. The Labour Party is adamant about that.

But the PR job succeeded to the extent that Glasgow has come to be seen as the exemplar for any city wishing to purchase the title of European City of Culture. The phrase 'New Labour' was not yet in use but what happened in 1990 Glasgow was a precursor to what has taken place since. The sanitization of the radical past was to the fore of the Labour Party agenda.

A few critics condemned the enterprise as a charade, as a financial nightmare.[2] For some it was an actual assault on art and culture, principally working-class culture. To pay for the jamboree 'the public funding of libraries, art galleries and museums; swimming baths, public parks and public halls [was] cut drastically. . . '[3] and cut altogether for many local community projects. The authorities rejected criticism and condemned the critics especially those who used the phrase 'working class'. They described them as philistines and kill-joys. It was an odd line of attack since a few of the critics were well-known writers, artists and musicians. One list of critics attacked publicly by the Labour politicians and arts administrators, then held to ridicule by the media, contained the names of some fifty artists, including Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead, Billy Connolly,

[2] When one heard the phrase 'culture city' bandied about by the politicians and media commentators "one thought of...the new Sheriff Court, the largest in Europe, with cell space in its bowels for 2000 prisoners in emergencies. Of the Scottish judiciary which imprisons a higher proportion of the population than any European country except Turkey..." see Farquhar McLay's Introduction to *Workers City* [Clydeside Press 1988]

[3] See my essay 'Art and Subsidy, and the Continuing Politics of Culture City', contained in *Some Recent Attacks, Essays Cultural and Political* (AK Press 1992).

Archie Hind and Tom Leonard.[4] But that hardly mattered. And what did they have to do with 'Culture Year' anyway?

Media figures and arts administrators joined the attack alongside the politicians and it proved effective. Artists whose politics are perceived as left-wing by the establishment are occasionally condemned in the same fashion nowadays, occasionally in the same clichéd language. Meanwhile the arts administrators have consolidated their hold on power; backed by political authorities and most of the mainstream media. They have become the most important cog in the Scottish art machine; the true creators of the country's art. They may not paint the pictures or write the books but they set the conditions for that to happen and what comes first: making the art or making the art possible?

They hired people with little knowledge of Scottish art and history. This is an old tactic. Ignorance at higher management level has been a feature of postwar political economy. Local communities might depend on one industry for survival: the steel, fishing and coal industries are obvious examples. When the authorities – state or 'captains' of industry – have to make harsh decisions about job losses it is better not to know of potential consequences for the local communities. A way of life might be wiped out: so what? This is why hatchet men are hired from the outside. The jobs can be taken from these communities more easily when personal attachments are nonexistent. The lessons of imperialism help. That same logic is applied when Scottish soldiers go marching as to war in India, Ireland or Iraq. The history of art cannot be kept separate from radical history for long, and indigenous art is always radical in cultures under siege. Scottish culture has been in that position for many many years.

A journalist acquaintance of my own *confessed* to enjoying 'Culture Year'. Surely some of it was enjoyable? Of course some of it was enjoyable. But when £50 million is spent somebody gets something. The cleverest of thieves and conmen could hardly net such a sum without giving something in return.

People were surprised by the ignorance and lack of sensitivity directed by the Labour authorities towards their own radical tradition and socio-political history. But a handful of politicians

[4] These and another forty artists and writers signed a protest letter published in a *Glasgow Herald* of 1990.

were all too aware of that same history and tradition and were intent on marginalising it, even re-writing it. One prime sector of Glasgow's old town had already been christened 'Merchant City'. This blatant manipulation of the city's history was at the core of the critique offered by Hugh Savage and others within the group known as Workers City.[5]

The name Workers' City carries obvious connotations but it was chosen to directly challenge 'Merchant City', highlighting the grossness of the fallacy that Glasgow somehow exists because of the tireless efforts of a tiny patriotic coalition of fearless 18th century entrepreneurs and far-sighted politicians. These same merchants and politicians made the bulk of their personal fortunes by the simple expedient of not paying the price of labour. . . Those legendary (Scottish) heroes our children are taught to honour – Buchanan, Miller, Ingram and so on – were men who trafficked in degradation, causing untold misery, death and suffering to scores of thousands of men, women and children. Yet this myth is perpetuated by the. . . Labour authorities who see themselves as far-sighted and fearlessly donate financial and other inducements to the (present-day) 'merchants'.[6]

Slave-owners are praised as heroes to generations of young people, a mythology peddled by our education and political authorities. There have been plenty of heroes in Glasgow and the central belt but most have figured in the struggle against injustice;

[5] In 1988 an open meeting was held in a social club at St George's Cross, Glasgow to discuss the proposed 'City of Culture' year and its relation to writers and artists. It was organised by the Free University Network and attended by a variety of writers, magazine editors and artists, including Eddie Boyd, Dominic Behan, Tom Leonard, Farquhar McLay, Freddie Anderson, Alasdair Gray, William Clark, Keith Miller, Malcolm Dickson, Peter Kravitz. I think Hugh Savage and Ned Donaldson were present. Some were associated with the anthology Workers City and formed a central part of the group. It should be noted that the anthology and the group were distinct. Neither Savage, Donaldson nor Leslie Forster contributed to the anthology. As both the open meeting and McLay's Introduction to the anthology *Workers City* make clear, many people had different opinions and perspectives on 'Culture Year'.

[6] *ibid* see Foreword

their names are not just forgotten but ignored, marginalised, occasionally suppressed.

When I met Hugh Savage on the picket line that February morning in 1990 he was alongside Leslie Forster and Ned Donaldson. The three had been close friends for forty five years. Hugh regarded highly his involvement in the Workers City group. And he enjoyed it. After a break of a few years it was a return to political activism. Others present included Isabel and Freddie Anderson, writer and editor Farquhar McLay and Jeanette McGinn, widow of the late great Matt McGinn, close friend and former comrade of some of those present. All were activists of long-standing and all were in at the start of the Workers City campaigning group. Around them was a wider circle of friends and acquaintances, young and old. Some were ex-members of political parties; some remained members of political parties. Present in abundance were experience and energy, physical and intellectual. Individuals held and expressed different opinions. In common was a left wing sensibility, an impatience with humbug and a distrust of professional politicians and arts administrators.

Workers City was a non-sectarian formation and did its best to remain that way. The group's critique of the European City of Culture produced the greatest wrath from the political authorities and their apologists within the media and arts establishment.

What angered the authorities most was that there was no way to stop people talking. Had the political machinery failed? Surely it and the media were there to control debate? What the hell was happening here!

One thing that did upset them was the appearance of an irregular scandal-mongering organ entitled *The Keelie*, produced anonymously and distributed freely. For decades in Scotland, the name 'keelie' has been applied pejoratively to Glaswegians, denoting 'low class', 'vulgar beings'. Absolutely appropriate for the Workers City group.

The Keelie became its heart. The appearance of this free newspaper coincided with particular campaigns and demonstrations. Its primary targets were Labour politicians and where possible named names and used photographs. *The Keelie* featured snippets of local history and occasional lampoons in the form of poetry or cartoon. Everybody associated with Workers City was encouraged to

contribute and some of the writings produced by Hugh Savage for the *Keelie* are included here in the addenda.

The Labour authorities knew they were in a fight and along the way they suffered some defeats. The most notable followed their bungled attempt to sell a third of Glasgow Green to private developers. They were unprepared for the depth of revulsion felt by Glaswegians. And of course they underestimated the opposition. That mistake derives from a failing common to politicians: arrogance, but an arrogance that thrives on ignorance. The sad truth is that contemporary Labour politicians have little or no knowledge of the origins of their own party. If so they might have approached the Workers City group with more caution.

The group received strong outside support and solidarity but rarely featured more than fifteen or twenty individuals.[7] There were no leaders within it but Hugh Savage was the pivotal figure, and he greatly enjoyed his participation. Until the late 1980s his main involvement had been with the Friends of the People's Palace. 'The Friends' were a group of volunteers who existed to support and raise funds for the People's Palace Museum on Glasgow Green. Money raised by them went from assisting in the purchase of historical relics and art objects to buying a photocopying machine for the Museum office.

Hugh's relationship to the People's Palace museum was an important factor in the Workers City campaigns. The museum's curator Elspeth King and her assistant Michael Donnelly had transformed the old place into something quite special.[8] It had become a proper people's museum whose existence gave the lie to the politicians' fantasy of Clydeside as historical home to budding billionaires and global entrepreneurs, whether in kilts or 501s. King and Donnelly knew the past and they treasured it, literally, on behalf of the people of Glasgow.

So the authorities wanted rid of them. They wanted people brought in from outside, preferably with no knowledge of the city's radical past and definitely without any personal attachment; they wanted people who would grasp the nettle, do the council's bidding,

[7] 'We just seemed a lot,' said Ian McKechnie, a regular participant.

[8] See *The People's Palace and Glasgow Green*, by Elspeth King [Richard Drew Publishing, 1985]

carry on the purge. By all means allow a place for working class culture but not on its own terms. Forget Willie Nairn, John Maclean, Harry McShane, Guy Aldred, bring on Harry Lauder, Rab C Nesbitt, Oor Wullie and the Broons. What about disease-ridden slums, state repression, police brutality, rent strikes and racism; sectarianism, the struggle for adequate living conditions; a proper life for our children? Forget it, not unless there is a happy ending. Tourists prefer to exit 'cultural outlets' – art galleries, theatres and museums – with a smile on their face. Financiers and prospective employers are better not to hear about militant suffragettes, socialists, anarchists and communists from Glasgow's radical past. Nor need they be reminded about that from Clydeside writers and artists. Where is their patriotism? Surely they could do more to help 'our' revival, 'our' regeneration.

Even the Calton district location of the People's Palace Museum presented the municipal authorities with a problem. As late as 2005, fifteen years after the mammoth costs of the 'European City of Culture' project, the life expectancy of males in this district was less than 54 years of age. It is an incredible statistic. For the UK as a whole the life expectancy of males was 75.9 years.[9] If the Labour Council could have uprooted the People's Palace and set it down in a prosperous suburb like Bearsden they would have aquired the funds from somewhere. Unfortunately for them Bearsden is not in Glasgow.

In their customary ruthless manner the Labour authorities sacked Michael Donnelly and denigrated his work. They tried to force Elspeth King's resignation by humiliating her publicly, then they forced her to apply for her own job. And then they gave the job to a man she had trained. Hugh Savage and the Workers City group campaigned to safeguard their positions. And the Glasgow citizenry rallied in support. Who ever heard of such a thing! A public campaign to save the job of a museum curator and her assistant?

Elspeth King's professional reputation extended way beyond the Scottish border. News of the campaign and of the treachery of the Labour authortities reached as far as Australia. More letters reached the *Glasgow Herald* newspaper than for any news event since the evangelist Billy Graham's tour in the 1950s. Finally the

[9] According to a *Guardian* report by Audrey Gillan, 21.1.05

authorities succeeded in ousting Ms King but not without a lengthy struggle.

Following the end of 'Culture Year' the activities of the Workers City group wound down but individuals remained in touch. For a period a few continued to publish *The Keelie*; some became involved in the struggle against industrial and environmental disease with *Clydside Action on Asbestos*. Around this period Hugh Savage flitted from the east end of Glasgow to Rothesay on the island of Bute. But two or three times a week he travelled into city's Mitchell Library to meet and research with Leslie Forster, Ned Donaldson,[10] and other friends.

He and Leslie Forster were members of the Glasgow Labour History Workshop. Radical history and political affairs, whether historical or contemporary; those were passions. They worked on projects before, during and after the time of Workers City and published *All for the Cause,* a book on Willie Nairn, 'Stonebreaker, Philosopher, Marxist'.[11] And they played a crucial part in the publication of others: *The Singer Strike Clydebank, 1911,*[12] *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900 – 195013; Roots of Red Clydeside 1910-1914 – Labour Unrest and Industrial Relations in West Scotland.*[14] Forster published his own memoir, *Rocking the Boat* and with Ned Donaldson, wrote *Sell and be Damned, The Glasgow Merrylee Housing Scandal of 1951.*

Reclaiming history, exhibiting the radical tradition; the work they accomplished is inspirational, packed full of information: to read them is to come into contact with a roll-call of outstanding men and women. They were more excited by the unknown or forgotten names, 'the unsung heroes who toiled to enlighten the workers without any thought of gain other than the spreading of

[10] *Sell and Be Damned; The Merrylee Housing Scandal of 1951*, by Edward 'Ned' Donalson and Leslie Forster [Clydeside Press 1992].

[11] *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn (1856-1902); Stonebreaker, Philosopher, Marxist* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster, published by themselves in 1991 [printed by Margaret McQuade McAuslan, assisted by Clydeside Press].

[12] Published by Clydebank District Library 1989

[13] *Essays in Honour of Harry McShane (1891-1988)* edited by Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor [John Donald, 1992]

[14] Edited by William Kenefick and Arthur McIvor [John Donald, 1996]

the word of Marx and Engels.'[15] Both in their memoirs and other work what becomes apparent is not only their knowledge of Glasgow's radical tradition, but their grasp of its political significance.

For all that, Hugh Savage was an activist first, and the writing came down the list. Yet he was always working on one thing or another. Beside the research, the campaigning copy and features there were angry letters to the powers-that-be. Such writing is done for immediate use, and not much of Hugh's output remains but some does, and in the addenda here are a few of his contributions to campaigning features from earlier times, published in *Socialist Revolt* and *New Commune*, two radical jopurnals that he and his friends and comrades produced back in the 1950s and early 1960s.

It is unclear when he began on his *Memoir*. It was not something he discussed easily. When he saw reviews for the publication of another 'life of an old socialist' he gave a shake of the head, No another one. . . He considered such projects an embarassing aspect of the ageing process. And here he was doing the same thing. He described himself as 'a foot-soldier' and worried about being presumptious. His family and friends encouraged him and he stuck to the task.

When he moved to the flat in Rothesay he did most of the heavy graft himself. He gutted the place and put in a new central heating system which meant boring through the sandstone wall of a tenement building. Then he redecorated completely, renovating all the plasterwork, the lot. Hugh was a plumber and welder to trade and had always been a fit active man, a teetotaller and nonsmoker. But he was then into his 70s. When he did find time to get on with his writing he experienced acute back pain. It became impossible to stay at the keyboard for long.

The stress he suffered from that move to Rothesay was not only physical. The political atmosphere on the island he found stultifying and anachronistic. This was the 1990s yet he saw religious sectarianism dividing a community still in thrall to the local aristocracy. He was not entirely joking when he said the Masonic Lodge controlled anything not already controlled by the Marquis of Bute. Everybody living in the place had to pay the aristocracy

15 I've lost this

ground rent. The Marquis was a feudal lord, a member of their family had been an English monarch. This side of Rothesay life was like a shameful secret. Hugh found it embarrassing. And nobody was doing anything about anything; they were just taking the punishment. That was the worst of all. Nobody was fighting back.

If an injustice was afoot it preyed on his mind. A battle was being waged against two of his elderly neighbours by the factors of the Marquis of Bute. Hugh took up the cudgels on their behalf and got sucked into the mire of civil disputation that occasionally masquerades as politics in this country. It was over a drainage or sewage problem. The sort of affair the Home Rule movement and formations like the current Scottish Parliament were set up to counter. At the same time he was tackling the authorities on his own behalf with his continued refusal to pay the Poll Tax. One skirmish led to his appearance at the High Court in Glasgow. It was over his refusal to have his name entered onto the Electoral Roll. He refused to pay all or any part of the fines levied against him and was prepared to do a couple of months 'porridge' if so required. When he was called to the dock he bewildered the court by addressing them on the theme of 'freedom'. Who was this old guy, this ghost of the radical past.

Each skirmish meant more time wasted in the composition of letters to the authorities. Life was getting in the way of the *Memoir.* His work was laid aside. He had taken it beyond boyhood, young manhood and the start of World War II. This was when he began work on the Clyde, joined the Communist Party, became a labour activist and militant trade unionist, got married, started a family. After the war he was blacklisted by the shipyards, and much of the building industry. He could not get a job because of his commitment as a CP activist, to the trade union cause and to the socialist movement in general. Within the party he had a growing reputation. A by-election had been called for Glasgow-Gorbals and the party offered him temporary work as an election agent. He writes of this in the *Memoir*; the one occasion in his political life that he accepted paid employment as a party official.

But that was that, for different reasons he was unable to continue the story. He had reached the year 1948.

The by-election of that year has been called because of the resignation of George Buchanan of the Labour Party. He had been

promoted to a junior ministerial position and was standing down. Tom Johnston was Secretary of State for Scotland and Buchanan became his junior. On the one hand this was thought too lowly a position for someone of Buchanan's standing. He had been a close friend of James Maxton, John Wheatley, the Reverend Campbell Stephen and members of the early Independent Labour Party (ILP). On behalf of the Labour Party he had introduced a Home Rule for Scotland bill. In those days the ILP was affiliated to the Labour Party. A little digging into radical history shows he was one of the original Red Clydesiders who stormed the Westminister barricades back in the early 1920s. In fact Buchanan was resigning the seat he had held since 1922.

The man who held the seat before Geordie Buchanan was George V. Barnes. He took the seat back in 1906. Thus, during that 42 year period only two MPs occupied the seat. But the bare facts conceal some extraordinary times. A little more digging reveals that the Glasgow-Gorbals constituency has been associated with some of the more significant election battles of the first quarter of last century.

Radical history is more complex than others. Not only is the history itself repressed so too is the radical movement. Repression is exercised by any ruling authority, left or right. Individuals are marginalised when it appears in the interests of a party hierarchy. Names are marginalised, glossed over, forgotten. So too are the issues, the disagreements and arguments. And conversely, the names of those who did nothing to advance the socialist and labour movement have been venerated.

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was quickly corrupted intellectually, but not from beginning to end. There were thousands of individuals within who acted in good faith and struggled on. Activists could and did involve themselves completely in the issues of the day, strikes, demonstrations, parades and commemorials such as May Day. There was much being done but it took place in a sort of intellectual vacuum. For any 'freethinker', the closer one got to power, the more demoralising it must have become. Without access to their own history and traditions how can people breathe? Every culture has its own traditions. How did people come to form the Communist Party and how did they fare

beyond? Almost since its inception, before Stalin succeeded Lenin, Comintern was crushing the life out of the socialist movement, and destroying its intellectual development.

The source of that development is the lives of other people and the closer we are to those lives the more vital is the development. This is why indigenous history is primary. In an occupied country indigenous history can only be radical. It is a class issue. The intellectual life of working class people is 'occupied'. In a colonised country intellectual occupation takes place throughout society. The closer to the ruling class we get the less difference there exists in language and culture, until finally we find that questions fundamental to society at its widest level are settled by members of the same closely knit circle, occcasionally even the same family or 'blood-line'. And the outcome of that can be war, the slaughter of working class people.

The generation who joined the Communist Party during World War I did not have access to the information we have today. They would have been familiar with aspects of the wider history of the socialist movement but rarely of their own radical tradition. Much of it had yet to be unravelled. A little of it had but remained obscure, deliberately or otherwise. Some is still unknown and mysteries exist that will plague us forever. The British State has secrecy orders placed on material from the nineteenth never mind the twentieth century. The establishment refers to it as 'politically sensitive'. What they mean is that if exposed it might damage them, by revealing clear evidence of their duplicity and involvement in the worst crimes, whatever it took to retain power.

For the Communist Party membership socialists from earlier times were taken seriously but for those who died before the formation of the party it was more difficult: they came from a sort of twilight period and their status for many communists was similar to that of Socrates, Plato or Cicero for Christians. Somehow they were guilty. But of what? Being born out of time? Could somebody be a genuine socialist who was not a member of the Communist Party? Semantics enter the argument: how do we define 'socialist', what features distinguish 'socialist' from 'communist'? And what about those born in time who had the option to join the party but rejected it? From the mid 1920s the Communist Party hierarchy had to deal with McShane and a few other renegades from within,

let alone John Maclean, John S. Clarke or Guy Aldred who were never party members in the first place.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was only formed in 1920, two years before the great 'Red Clydeside' victory at the 1922 General Election. Prior to then male and female activists had come through struggle together, over many years. Syndicalists, suffragettes and reformist socialists; anti parliamentary communists, catholic socialists, presbyterian socialists, anarchists, industrial unionists. Those and more were around and easily confound an older assessment that 'the always parochial character of Clydeside politics offered only two competing ideologies, that of the Marxist SLP and that of the ILP.'[16]

There may have been sectarianism, political as well as religious, but on the left there was also a general commitment to certain tenets, eg. the anti-war position, universal suffrage, adequate housing, a proper education, health care etc. That commitment extended to a common political end and the acceptance of the validity of much Marxian theory.

But there were other elements to that shared perspective. Marxism was not then institutionalised within power structures. On different fronts it would become so, emptied of much of its philosophical and ethical – or humanist – base for the sake of its 'use-value'; the economic and micro-political employed as a sort of managerial strategy. On Clydeside and elsewhere people lived by a set of principles and were prepared to confront the full might of the British State, they were prepared to go to prison, and some were prepared to die for what they believed. There were divergences; some thought religion and Marxism mutually exclusive, others that they might be reconciled. But the fact remains that for many working class people in Scotland an alternative way of life was on offer, it was not just a matter of economics.

The early socialists had almost no relevant literature at all. They had to create it then publish and distribute it themselves. Nowadays there is a great deal but it remains obscure, unavailable in bookshops, except secondhand ones. And radical history itself is never taught outside of specialised areas in departments of higher

[16] p46 Robert Keith Middlemas *The Clydesiders: a left wing struggle for Parliamentary power* [Hutchinson 1965, reprinted August M. Kelley, New York 1968]

education; and only then as a function of the interests of individual academics. At ordinary school level there is hardly anything; children are still force-fed the establishment diet of imperial victories and monarchical lineage. In the 1960s and 70s a short lived attempt came about through the subject known as Modern Studies. Eventually it was dumped. 'Ordinary' radical history is virtually unknown to the wider public.

Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster write that their own interest and eventual excavatory work in radical history would never have happened but for. . .

> the enthusiastic guidance and encouragement of Harry McShane. For years he told us of the early pioneers of the socialist movement, most of whom he had met, spoke with, worked with, and even gone to jail with.[17]

For a quick idea of the world that opened up go to the index of *No Mean Fighter*.[18] This is not a written autobiography. It was dictated by McShane. Through regular conversations with him forgotten names from Clydeside's radical past became familiar to Savage, Forster and friends, also a familiarity and knowledge with a tradition that was under severe attack, and continues to be so. The names of these early socialists peppered their own conversation and their ease with radical history is evident in their writings.

The fifty year span from the Paris Commune through the formation of the CPGB into the mid 1920s was a spectacular period in socialist history. On Clydeside a rare collection of individuals came and went. Some names remain familiar: Keir Hardie, Maxton, Connolly and Maclean. Others are less familiar: Guy Aldred, Willie Gallacher, R.B.Cunninghame-Graham, John Wheatley, John McGovern, John Muir, Eunice Murray, John S. Clarke, Maggie Moffatt; Bob Hutcheson, Dr Elizabeth Chalmers-Smith, James McDougall, Jane Rae, John Murdoch, Neil Maclean, Harry Hopkins; William Haddow, J.Bruce Glasier, Mary Barbour, Agnes Dollan, Patrick Dollan, J.R.Campbell, George Barrett, Emmanuel Shinwell; William Nairn, George S.Yates, James Messer; William Paul, Helen Crawford, Tom Bell, Arthur McManus.

[17] See their *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902*

[18] *No Mean Fighter,* Harry McShane and Joan Smith (Pluto Press 1975)

This list of names is not exhaustive. Most of the people are of an ordinary working class background, similar to that of Hugh Savage and friends. Some would have figured as heroes to their generation, as they would to the youth of the present day, if they knew of their existence. It would not matter to which party they belonged. But their ideas would have mattered, the motivation, what brought them there, the nature of the struggle, how they responded, the sacrifices they made along the way, and so on.

In 1922 George Buchanan's left wing rival for Glasgow-Gorbals was John Maclean. Maclean had contested the previous General Election in 1918. It was the first postwar General Election and Maclean was then a leading member of the British Socialist Party (BSP), a forerunner of the CPGB. In that year, much to the horror of Labour's National Executive the Gorbals Labour constituency selected Maclean as their prospective candidate.

The BSP was affiliated to the Labour Party so such a thing was possible. Beyond Parliament the Labour Party was hardly a 'party' at all, but a loose group of left wing bodies, ranging from the BSP to the Fabians, by way of the ILP and assorted trades unions. MPs could be sponsored by any one of these different formations. George Buchanan had been nominated to represent the pattern-makers trade union although he was a member of the ILP.

When the Gorbals nominated Maclean for that 1918 election he was in prison doing five years hard labour for sedition. This when 'the Scottish system was probably one of the most inhuman in Europe.'[19] Maclean was known internationally, a hero within the wider socialist movement, recently appointed by Soviet Russia as their first British Consul. On Clydeside he was one of a group of major left wing activists; a leading figure and by far the most prominent, but not *the* leader. There was no leader in that sense.

Within the left there were conflicting views. Among factories and shipyards on the Clyde few were as effective as Arthur McManus, Davie Kirkwood and Willie Gallacher; each a shop steward, each a member of the Clyde Workers Committee. The ILP's John Wheatley was as influential as anyone, more so in some quarters. He said of Maclean 'John's ability and fearlessness. . . have singled him out as one of the great rebel leaders of our time, and consequently one of

[19] 126 Milton's *John Maclean*

the first subjects of persecution. Our rulers fear Maclean more than they do the whole Labour Party.'[20]

Clearly the state authorities wanted rid of him, and managed to imprison him on six occasions. Their cynical, often brutal treatment, had its effect and finally Maclean was dead at the age of 44. When they had him on trial in July 1918 the legal procedure and severity of the judgment was blatantly biased: 'In the officers came, one after another, with parrot-like repetitions of carefully coached and memorised 'stories'. On the most appalling testimony of little 'patriots', led by a 'patriot' judge. . . [Maclean was] sentenced to five years' penal servitude.[21]

For some within the Coalition Government it was a political embarassment but they got away with it. And while Maclean was incarcerated they did not interfere with the procedure. Maclean was held in contempt and subject to vile treatment by the prison authorities and by their medics. He was imprisoned in April of that year and sentenced in July, and he embarked on an immediate hunger strike. He was refused all visitors and the prison authorities force-fed him. They used two warders to restrain him physically while rubber tubes were inserted by the medical staff.

At the end of October his wife Agnes was at last granted access. She discovered that he was being 'fed by a stomach tube twice daily' which was 'forced down his gullet or up his nose.' She had been advised earlier that such a thing would never happen unless the relatives were forewarned. The authorities ignored that. They were after Maclean and '[the] most worrying aspect of [his] imprisonment down to 1918 was the collusion between the State, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Lord Advocate and the army generals in Scotland to defame and misrepresent their vulnerable prisoner.'[22]

The Clydeside left had few illusions about the political sympathies of the British State, that 'invincible alliance of aristocrats and capitalists, with its overwhelming control both of the Houses

[20] Written for 'Catholic Notes' in 'Forward' cited by Nan Milton, p49 John Maclean.

[21] p199 Gallacher, Willie *Revolt on the Clyde*, p212 [Lawrence & Wishart 1936]

[22] See James D. Young p207 *John Maclean: Clydeside Socialist* [Clydeside Press 1992]

of Parliament and of the courts of law.'[23] Nevertheless, even radicals highly experienced in the workings of domestic security could not have known the extent of the collusion between the Whitehall Government and private 'right wing groups such as the Navy League and the Anti-Socialist Union [also] the British Empire Union. . . ' During World War I these formations. . .

> helped Special Branch and MI5 by attempting to locate German agents, spies and saboteurs. This assistance continued when surveillance was extended to include pacifists, the anti-war movements, socialists and those engaged in war-time strikes. These informal arrangements carried over into the post-war years when the Security Service became alarmed at the dramatic upsurge of industrial unrest and political militancy. . . Militant trade unionists, radical socialists, and communists were now seen as the new enemy. [24]

John Maclean was not suffering delusions. He was targeted.[25] State surveillance is one historical element rarely remarked upon anywhere, except by those who endure it. Individuals who suffered personal harassment during the time of John Maclean were far more sympathetic to his plight. Tom Mann, James Larkin and Guy Aldred are three outsiders who were so targeted and each was acquainted with the radical scene on Clydeside. Each lived to an old age but unlike many of Maclean's Clydeside comrades none of the trio changed his opinions on Maclean. None charged him with delusions or behaviour that might have arisen from a source other than the extreme victimisation to which he was subject. And where Maclean's behaviour might have been open to such criticism outsiders such as Mann, Larkin and Aldred, knew from their own personal experience the extent of state surveillance. Even then, neither of the trio suffered the same physical hardship.

People around Maclean were aware of the problem but ignorant

[23] p90 *The British working-class Movement 1787-1947* G.D.H.Cole [Allen & Unwin 2nd edition 1927]

[24] See *Lobster 22*

[25] See James D. Young's *John Maclean: Clydeside Socialist* for good information on this

of the extent to which he was targeted and generally underestimated the effects such targeting can have on the individuals and their families. In retrospect the case is typical. The language used by contemporaries to describe his later behaviour is consistent with what we know on the subject nowadays. Their willingness to seek fault in the individual, in other words 'blame the victim', is also consistent. Coupled with that was the political reality. In 1919, the time of the 40 hour a week strike and the massive demonstrations in George Square, Maclean was back in prison, and by 1920 his time had gone. There was no longer room for singularity. The October Revolution altered the course of the socialist movement and the intellectual influence of Lenin was pervasive, for better or worse. 'The Communist Parties are dead: long live the Communist Party.'[26]

It is ironic that this was stated by Maclean's old comrade Arthur McManus. The irony is heightened by his personal experience of the power of the British State. McManus had good reason to know about the spy system and the work of *agents provocateurs*. The anti-war movement had been strong among the Clydeside left, in particular within the Clyde Workers Committee of which he was a leading shop steward.

> Throughout the war the Government resorted to the old practice of sending spies amongst the militant workers as informers and provocateurs. The ammunition shops were riddled with them. The Workers' Committees were pestered with them.[27]

In early 1916 the Coalition Government stepped up its attempts to nullify the anti-war movement on Clydeside and destroy the power of the Clyde Workers Committee. They took the drastic step of imprisoning leading radicals such as Maclean, Patrick Dollan, Maxton, John Muir and James MacDougall. Then they deported McManus and five other shop stewards, all leading members of the Clyde Workers Committee.[28] In radical history he remains an

[26] Arthur McManus cited by p13 Pelling, Henry *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* [A and C Black Ltd. 1958]

[27] McShane in *No Mean Fighter*.

[28] Tom Bell, James Messer, Davie Kirkwood and ...

enigma. By contemporary accounts he was a strong personality, for some a hard-liner, and first Chairman of the CPGB. Nevertheless, at that earlier period, still a member of the ???? ???? ???? (SLP), he was one of the few who 'succeeded in breaking through the paralysing influence of De Leonism.'[29]

> When war was declared [John Maclean] held a big meeting at Nelson's Monument to state his revolutionary anti-war position. The meeting was notable also because Arthur McManus spoke alongside John. . . Arthur was in the SLP and until then it had been almost impossible to get anyone from the SLP on a platform with any other socialist organisation.'[30]

But there was an additional reason why McManus was more knowledgeable than most about the machinations of British State 'domestic security'. During the enforced exile McManus travelled south from Edinburgh and in England he met his future wife, a young woman whose mother kept 'open house' for anti-war activists and militant socialists on the run. She was Hetty Wheeldon, younger daughter of the great 'Alice Wheeldon, a militant suffragette and socialist [who] along with [her elder] daughter and son-in-law were sentenced to ten years' penal servitude, five years and seven years respectively for 'plotting' to assassinate Lloyd George.'[31] Of course it was an outrageous and shameful lie by the British State.

While in prison the Wheeldon family embarked on a series of hunger strikes. Political prisoners used hunger strikes then as now to draw attention to the injustices perpetrated by the state authorities. Imprisoned women of the early suffragette movement were to the fore in that, as were Irish prisoners. The Government passed the 'Cat and Mouse' Bill to help them defeat the suffragettes. The authorities felt that a group of dying women was unsound politically. This legal move allowed them to release female hunger strikers shortly before their predicted death. While at home their friends and family would look after these women, they would feed them

[29] p26 of Gallacher's *Revolt on the Clyde*

[30] McShane, *No Mean Fighter* p67

[31] See the same 1998 issue of *Statewatch* as referred to above.

up and care for them, try to get them strong again. If they survived and regained a degree of physical strength the police would come back and re-arrest them. If the women died at home it would not look so bad.

The state authorities used this tactic with other anti-war activists, for example Guy Aldred. They were concerned that the public might be sickened by the logical outcome to a hunger strike, i.e. death of the prisoner. They were less concerned by Irish deaths. Irish people were considered hardly people at all. If they were, they were indistinguishable. In the midst of their ruthless assault on Ireland and the Irish people highly-placed individuals within the British establishment thought that nationalists and republicans were a part of the Home Rule movements. This is the essence of racism, where the possibility of individual difference cannot be distinguished.

In August 1920 Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork was 'arrested in Cork City Hall.' The Royal Irish Constabulary had already murdered the city's previous mayor, Tom·s MacCurtain, while the British looked on. Now they brought MacSwiney to England, and to Brixton Prison where '[he] went on hunger-strike, thus focusing world attention on the Irish cause. He died in October 1920 on the seventy fifth day of his hunger-strike.'[32]

Alice Wheeldon and her family served a couple of years in prison and then were released, following a series of hunger-strikes. Alice died a few months later. Her eldest daughter and son-in-law contracted pneumonia and were close to death for several weeks. This is the affair that Arthur McManus would have known about intimately. It was through him that Tom Bell got to know of the case.[33]

That contemptible action by the British State was only compounded by the fact that it took Her Majesty's Government until June 1998, a period of seventy one years, to finally confess what had been known all along, that it was a complete 'set up' from beginning to end, that the family were 'entrapped by Alex Gordon and Herbert Booth, both agents of a MI5 branch known as PMS2.'[34]

At the time of the events the left was outspoken in its attacks on HM Government. In the socialist newspaper, *Worker,* its editor, John

[32] See p33 Meda Ryan's *Tom Barry: IRA Freedom Fighter*

[33] See p 126-7 Tom Bell's *Prioneering Days*

[34] Information in Statewatch? or *Lobster 22*

S. Clarke, was particularly scathing, and accused Lloyd George of personal responsibility.'There are several ways of murdering our valiant women comrades. There is the straightforward, brutal way of sheer murder, which killed Rosa Luxemburg. And there is the secret, sinister, cowardly and slower method which killed Mrs Wheeldon.'

Seventy one years of official denial could not have occurred but for the collusion of highly placed individuals within the Labour Party. This allowed British offialdom, spies and *agent provocateurs* to escape exposure. It further allowed a network of far right, private enterprise formations to strengthen covert operations domestically. Contrary to conventional wisdom the main target of domestic security is not foreign infiltrators and terrorists, it is the left wing public, and it always has been. Secrecy is the nature of these operations. The obfuscation of radical history embraces the role of the domestic security forces, and further conceals it. MI5's involvement in Ireland is no secret but what is less well-known is the extent of the spy operations that were activated, not only in Ireland but in Britain itself. An organisation known as National Propaganda 'functioned as [its] central co-ordinating body.' Only a few outsiders knew of the network's existence. No matter how extreme these far right bodies were, including the openly fascist, they were given access to 'confidential intelligence material' belonging to HM Government. It was to this network that Lloyd George appealed in 1919 'to defeat the Railway Strike'.[35]

Even those radicals highly experienced in the workings of domestic security during the 1914-18 war could not have known the extent of the collusion between the Coalition-Government and private 'right wing groups such as the Navy League and the Anti-Socialist Union [also] the British Empire Union'. These formations

> . . . helped Special Branch and MI5 by attempting to locate German agents, spies and saboteurs. This assistance continued when surveillance was extended to include pacifists, the anti-war movements, socialists and those engaged in war-time strikes. These informal arrangements carried over into the post-war years when the Security Service became alarmed at the dramatic

[35] See James D. Y

> upsurge of industrial unrest and political militancy. . . Militant trade unionists, radical socialists, and communists were now seen as the new enemy. [36]

The Clyde Workers Committee was composed of some of the more committed activists of the time and there is no question how they were regarded. This was demonstrated when shop stewards were deported and others imprisoned under the Defence of the Realm Act. Many were employed at the more famous Clydeside factories and shipyards, and almost all had attended classes organised by Maclean and comrades.

A few of these same shop stewards had worked previously at Singer's factory in Clydebank and were involved in a major industrial action that took place in 1911, and ranks as one of the most crucial 'in the History of Labour alongside the Dockers' Strike of 1889, and the Engineers' Lock-out of 1897.'[37] It began as 'a spontaneous outburst of rank and file aggression, initiated by women workers [and led] by a democratically elected Strike Committee [which] brought together workers across a broad spectrum.'

The Singer management had honed its UK industrial relations from its US-based operations. Here at Clydebank they responded with a ruthlessness that shocked the workforce: 'the resultant victimisation. . . [was] quite extraordinary and the militancy of the workforce. . . countered by mass sackings of between 400 and 1000 workers. . . [including] the whole of the almost 200-strong Strike Committee.'[38] Many were blacklisted and would have remained so except for the outbreak of the 1914-18 War. Skilled and semi skilled workers soon found employment on the Clyde. A few became members of the Clyde Workers Committee, whose

> . . . militant use of the strike weapon, of direct action. . . owed much to the strategies previously formulated by the revolutionary industrial unionists on the Clyde. . . The CWC was in essence a federal industrial union, constituted

[36] Information in Statewatch? or *Lobster 22*

[37] See *Lobster 22*

[38] See *The Singer Strike Clydebank, 1911*, by the Glasgow Labour History Workshop, published Clydebank District Library, 1989

> of representatives of all firms involved in munition manufacture thus [replicating] the structures promulgated by the IWGB and initiated in practice in Singer.

The syndicalist influence of the SLP is here in evidence and shop stewards from Singers who became members of the CWC include McManus, Bell, Paul, Messer and Neil MacLean.

But their influence during the Singer strike should not be overemphasised. Tom Bell was the archetypal 'party' man. A founder member of the CPGB and one of its two first paid full-time officials [the other was Harry Pollitt]. Even after Bell was kicked aside in the upheavals of the mid-1920s he remained a loyalist to the bitter end. He was a shop steward during the 1911 Singer industrial action but expressed misgivings personally. He thought a strike inevitable but that 'we were not yet ready to exercise firm control and discipline.' The female workforce made their own decision. '[The] spark which ignited' the action was struck not by a politically-motivated caucus or vanguard action of party members but by 'the stand taken by the women polishers.'

Shop floor activists at the Singer factory included Jane Rae and Frances Abbott and neither were members of any political party. Several months after the strike Rae joined the ILP, 'after hearing Keir Hardie.' Frances Abbott was also in the ILP and 'involved with. . . the Women's Section of the Labour Party,' and fifty years later 'was given a testimonial by the Labour Party for her. . . 'services to the people's cause.'[39]

It was the activity itself that politicised the workforce. Members of the female contingent later were involved in the Glasgow rent strikes of 1915 where Agnes Dollan and Helen Crawford were to the fore.[40] Agnes was the wife of Patrick Dollan, friend of John Wheatley and an early participant in meetings of the Catholic Socialist Society. He was imprisoned in 1916, along with Maxton, Maclean, McDougall and John Muir. Agnes was

> . . . involved with the Women's Labour League [and]

[39] The last quote is from Tom Bell, p135-6 cited by McIvor and Paterson in their discussion in Knox's book

[40] See appendices to *The Singer Strike; Clydebank, 1911* by the Glasgow Labour History Workshop [Clydebank District Library 1989)

> the professors of political economy in the universities claim to be impartial men of science. But nobody believes them; their attitude is recognised as a necessary, professional pose. Their teaching has become a mere system of apologetics, by means of which they reveal the moral reasons that justify the plundering of the working class.[47]

Following his imprisonment in 1916 he was released less than halfway through the five year sentence. This because Lloyd George was set to arrive in Glasgow. The local authorities were to present him with a 'Freedom of the City' award[48] and it would have looked bad if thousands of angry Glaswegians turned up at the ceremony to protest the continued victimisation and barbaric treatment of a local hero. So they released him. If the state wants something it finds a way.

On the approach to the first postwar General Election the Coalition Government did not want a working class socialist martyr, certainly not one renowned internationally and whose work as an educator was proving as politically significant as his general activism. Had Maclean stayed on hunger-strike and experienced much more of the force-feeding he would have died. The authorities knew that. They were very experienced in the grand fight against hunger strikers. Although there were arguments for allowing Maclean's death it made sense to release him, and protect the Coalition Government from a sympathy vote against their candidate. After all, they could re-arrest him for 'sedition' any time they liked. Once he recovered some of his health he might endure another bout of prison.

Now into December and with a few days to go before polling day, the authorities released him. He had served only seven months of a five year sentence.

It was a flagrant admission of culpability by the authorities and a demonstration of the value they placed on Maclean's influence. He had been foremost among the anti-war campaigners and a leader of the anti-conscription campaign in early 1916. For the past decade he had devoted himself to educational as well as propaganda work, in the tradition of Willie Nairn, Bob Hutcheson and George S. Yates,

[47] See p 119 Nan Milton *op. cit.*

[48] p118 *In the Rapids of Revolution*

his old mentors from the Glasgow branch of the ???? ????? ???????? (SDF). Aided by comrades like James MacDougall the success of his work was illustrated by the quality of the younger Clydeside activists who had attended his classes. Not only was his educational work providing a theoretical basis for their militancy, his presence had become emblematic. He carried something of the aura that student circles create round a gifted teacher. And add to that the victimisation he had endured from the authorities. Those who doubted Maclean's wider political significance simply had to look at his treatment at the hands of the British State.

A crowd of thousands assembled in Glasgow to greet his release from prison. Those with no experience of prison life nor of the damaging effects of hunger-strikes failed to appreciate the deterioration in his physical condition. Maclean was too ill even to speak, and far too ill to conduct an election campaign. His deputy candidate was Willie Gallacher who would have 'refused' to stand on his own behalf but agreed to deputise for Maclean.[49] At that time Gallacher was opposed to parliamentary involvement by the left. He was 'a member of the Scottish Workers' Council, whose function was to promote 'communes', not Party communism.'[50] He had yet to discover tricky Bolshevik concepts like 'revolutionary parliamentarianism.'[51] In those days Clydeside socialists would have guffawed at an obvious contradiction. Later Lenin would point out to them that it need not represent a contradiction at all.[52]

When the results of the 1918 General Election were known Maclean had polled 7500 votes. But the sitting member for the Coalition-Government, George N. Barnes, doubled that number and hung onto the seat he had held since 1906.

Back then Keir Hardie had come in person to canvas on behalf of Barnes. Keir Hardie was very aware of the situation as it applied in a constituency like Glasgow-Gorbals, or Blackfriars as it then was. It is an additional element and, while not to be exaggerated, can never be discounted. On Clydeside, particularly in a district like the Gorbals, political affairs are complicated by issues affecting

[49] p140-1 Milton *op. cit.*

[50] See Gallagher's *Revolt on the Clyde*

[51] Caldwell somewhere

[52] 206 Gallacher *op. cit.* p212

the Irish diaspora. Like any other immigrant group the Irish population and their descendants are also concerned with the politics of the 'mother' country.

By the turn of the twentieth century the Irish Home Rule Movement had gathered momentum throughout Britain and the Irish National League (INL) thrived; Glasgow 'branches [affiliated] to the Workers' Municipal Election Committee. . . and this cooperation proved important in building up Labour and working-class representation in the government of the city. . . '[53] In 1900 the INL '[merged] with the new United Irish League. . . to become part of. . . a new and stronger Home Rule campaign on either side of the Irish Sea.'[54] Keir Hardie wished to influence the Gorbals electorate on behalf of the Labour candidate, so he made an appeal to John Redmond, leader of the Irish Home Rule movement.

What happened was slightly complicated. Redmond did not reject the appeal from Keir Hardie, but 'gave an understanding in such guarded terms that it was almost useless. However, the local. . . United Irish League rebelled against Redmond and the clear advice of the [Roman Catholic] Church, and told its members to vote Labour.'[55]

And a majority did vote Labour, thus Barnes was elected. Their reasons and motivation would have varied. The Gorbals population was not solely composed of an Irish diaspora but perhaps as much as 60% belonged to it. The district had been the traditional home for assorted immigrants, notably East Europeans in the nineteenth century, and a strong jewish community lived there still. However, even had it been a purely Irish population what difference would it have made to the result? Of course the Catholic Church exercised a huge influence but other voices existed. In the early days of last century Irish socialists were advising their English, Welsh and Scottish comrades not to vote Home Rule at all.

Not only socialists opposed Home Rule. For a great many it was self determination, independence or nothing. Connolly and a

[53] In his *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, especially in his section on the years the Bolsheviks spent operating on two fronts, legally and illegally.

[54] p13 ? Wood, Ian S. *John Wheatley* [Manchester University Press 1990]

[55] *ibid.*

few Irish comrades sought the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic. But a far larger number who favoured independence and gave allegiance to the 'Sinn Féin leadership [who] resolutely opposed. . . the republican movement developing a socialist character.'[56] There was even a small but significant group in Ireland prepared to fight to preserve Whitehall rule and their secondary status as a people, not only protestants. And not all protestants were Loyalists. They could be met under any banner, as had been the case since the days of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen a hundred years before.

The variety of political opinion found in Ireland was found to some extent within the Irish communities of Central Scotland, and in their sister communities elsewhere. In 1902 Connolly was visiting USA, attending meetings and lecturing under the auspices of Daniel De Leon's Socialist Labour Party. He spoke to Irish immigrants on the need not for Home Rule but for an independent Ireland. Later he would return to live and work in USA, taking his wife and family with him. But in 1903 he was back in Scotland addressing meetings formally and informally. A few of the Glasgow branch of the SDF had lately been expelled or had moved away, including his old friend and comrade from Edinburgh, George S.Yates.

Yates made a telling contribution for the SDF as an educator. He held his classes at 62 Adelphi Street, Gorbals. Among those in attendance were Willie Paul, Arthur McManus and Tom Bell who later expressed his 'deep depth of gratitude to [Yates] who saved me endless floundering by leading me direct to the sources of the knowledge I desired. . . the basic theoretical works of Marxism and the writings of the great masters of science and literature. . . ' [57]

His close friend and comrade Willie Nairn was a vital influence of that period and did most of his educational work around the St George's Cross area. The local SDF branch was at 17 Cromwell Street, near St George's Cross. John Maclean came to these meetings. He was then teaching at a school in Lambhill, to the north of the city. For his political activitites he was disciplined by the education authorities and removed to Lorne Street, Ibrox. Soon he was removed altogether, nobody else would employ him. He

[56] p34 Middlemas *op. cit.*

[57] p165 John Newsinger, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement* [The Merlin Press 2004]

'founded the Pollokshaws branch of the SDF. . . in 1906. . . and took a weekly evening class, from 1908 until his first imprisonment in 1915. . . '[58]

The SDF's push on propaganda and education impressed Maclean greatly and he later held meetings in this area himself. Nairn, Yates and Hutchison operated classes on political economy for young and old, everybody welcome.

> Long before Comrade Keir Hardie we had Comrades Willie Nairn and Bob Hutchison – two veteran members of the SDF – to name two only – in the Jail Square who held meetings on the Sundays, from ten o'clock in the morning till ten o'clock at night. The meetings were carried on in the relay system and were well-known. Comrade John [Maclean] had often listened to these comrades, and it was from them he received his first lessons on scientific socialism.[59]

At one such meeting he met his future wife, encouraged by Willie Nairn's daughter at a meeting at the corner of Shamrock Street and New City Road.[60]

Besides his SDF activities Nairn was an organiser of the early Co-operative movement. Assorted guest speakers now arrived in the city. Names integral to the international socialist movement visited; among them Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann and Leo Melliet, then domiciled in Leith, a veteran of the Paris Commune. Visitors were put up by the organisers and their friends. One of Nairn's guests was Peter Kropotkin, around 1895, and Nairn's daughter, Annie Gordon, remembered 'sitting on the great man's knee when she was an infant.[61]

[58] See Bell *op. cit.*

[59] p10 the introduction to *In the Rapids of Revolution*.

[60] See Nan Milton, p28 citing her father's first biographer, Tom Anderson.

[61] See the fuller account in Annie Gordon's recollections of John Maclean also in *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster. Mrs Gordon was Willie Nairn's daughter. She gave Michael Donnelly a taped interview in 1979. The tape is lost but a short transcript remains. Donnelly allowed Savage and Forster access to it.

There were a few anarchists on Clydeside at that time. Annie Gordon remembered that the Russian revolutionary was not the anarchist who impressed her the most; this was Guy Aldred, whom she met later. By then she had become'a regular activist in the anarchist federation.'[62] One anarchist group seems to have formed in Glasgow the year after Nairn's death which would put it around 1903. It was from the Socialist League that the early anarchists emerged.[63] The Socialist League itself formed from a split in the SDF ranks in the 1880s.

Beside their educational work these early Clydeside radicals '[held] seven and eight meetings per week, as the old files of *Justice* show. . . [and] debating, lecturing, writing and propagating Socialism. . . [organising] great demonstrations, numbering sometimes 12,000 persons on Glasgow Green.'[64] All of this they were achieving in their 'spare' time.[65] In those days they worked a minimum ten hour day, doing the heaviest manual work. Nairn worked as a stonebreaker. Like many of his comrades he was a parent; he and his wife had to ensure the survival of their family in conditions of severe poverty, and 'these years of open-air toil and [activism] told heavily. . . [Nairn] died in 1902 at the age of forty six.'[66] Even so, he outlived two of his own children. His wife lived until 1940, and 'worked as an attendant in the [public] toilets in West Campbell Street.'

George S. Yates gave a fine oration at the funeral of his friend. The text is given in the addenda to Hugh Savage and Les Forster's biography of Nairn. They make the point that the Glasgow branch of the SDF was 'composed mainly of workers [whereas] the

[62] *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster.

[63] See 'Boy Preacher, Social Democrat, Prisoner of Conscience (repeatedly), Conscientious Objector, Anarcho-Communist, orator, writer, publisher. . .' also see Caldwell

[64] But for a slightly different look at the origins of the Glasgow Anarchist Group see p219, and p200 for the ILP in 1906, Paton, John *Proletarian Piligrimage* [Routledge 1935]. See also John McGovern in *Neither Fear nor Favour*.

[65] See addenda to *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster.

[66] I thank Tommy Gorman for a timely reminder on this fundamental point.

leadership was strongly in the hands of middle class and upper class intellectuals [and was] purely elitist: emancipation would come from the top and be ushered in by educated leaders.'[67, 68] Throughout his life Yates remained. . .

> an unswerving revolutionary socialist and the scourge of right-wing traitors. In 1910 [he] attended the Paris Congress of the Second International at which his voice was heard denouncing backsliders and reaffirming his belief in a socialist goal. He returned. . . carrying an English translation and music of *The Internationale* thus, for the first time, that stirring ballad was introduced to the British working-class.[69]

In the same year of 1910 the Fourth International and Trades' Congress took place in Copenhagen and Scottish delegates included the ILPers Keir Hardie, Bruce Glasier and William Haddow who records 'that the Government thought us sufficiently important to send one of their secret agents to keep an eye on us.'[70] In those days the Clydeside left had few illusions about the British State, that 'invincible alliance of aristocrats and capitalists, with its overwhelming control both of the Houses of Parliament and of the courts of law.'[71] From the end of theeighteenth century they led the way in the espionage industry, and their impact was conspicuous during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, culminating in the State murder of three weavers that ended the Scottish Insurrection.

[67] See Yates' fine 'Tribute to W.J.Nairn', contained in the addenda to *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster. Nairn's wife lived on until 1940, and 'worked as an attendant in the [public] toilets in West Campbell Street.'

[68] The title of Nairn's biography, *All for the Cause*, is the title of a hymn by William Morris. Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster have taken the words from the tribute to Nairn by George S.Yates who says the hymn was sung by the mourners at Nairn's funeral.

[69] p34 *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* by Hugh Savage and Leslie Forster.

[70] *ibid.*

[71] William Martin Haddow, *My Seventy Years*, p132

Hugh Savage and Les Forster were led to research and publish their book on Nairn's life through the influence of Harry McShane who was a boy at the time of Nairn's death. He had become familiar with his lifework as educator and propagandist through word of mouth, via such as Maclean and James MacDougall.

Each generation of working class activists has had to learn mainly through its own experience and by what is passed on by 'tradition-bearers' – older activists, unembittered parents and grandparents. Any learning to be done takes place as a personal or community project. The early radical socialists were well aware of that and much time and effort was expended on educating themselves and each other through discussion groups and meetings. One crucial element of Nairn's educational practice was his ability to '[pass] on the message in language understood by workers thirsting for knowledge. . .' This was a feature of the old Common Sense tradition in Scottish philosophy. It was never enough simply to know the subject, one had to pass on the information. This was at the heart of its political significance.

Any history that cannot distinguish the intellectual traditions within Britain cannot succeed. Harry McShane knew this and refers to the distinction between the socialist movement in this country and that of England, writing of the debates in Glasgow prior to the 1914-18 war:

> Scotland had a tremendous reputation for theological hair-splitting. As well as the catholic v protestant debates, the arguments about church government were very important here. Calvinism was still very strong and to get people away from it, or from catholicism, meant a big fight about secularism. The free-thought fight was very good for the Scottish socialists. It sharpened them and led them into thinking about socialist principles more deeply, whereas in England some elements of the socialist movement formed a rival faith, more or less, to the Christian Church. . . .[72]

[72] p90 *The British working-class Movement 1787-1947* G.D.H.Cole [Allen & Unwin 2nd edition 1927]

Although respect was accorded the regard for ideas and first principles that existed in Scottish socialist circles some saw it as a drawback to actual struggle; too much energy being dissipated in the theoretical argy-bargy. Once on Glasgow Green Bronterre O'Brien advised an incredible assembly of '130,000 people' that 'he would not give a fig for all their clamouring and clapping of hands, unless [they] were prepared to do something effective. . .'[73] An echo of this critique of the Scottish predilection for discussion was voiced some 70 years later at one of John Maclean's lectures on Marxian economics, meetings that attracted massive audiences. The overseas visitor who was less than impressed by one of John Maclean's mass lectures was known in Glasgow.

> . . . as Jack White the Irishman, who wanted to be in on any possibility of a fight. John [Maclean] had been explaining marxist economics; the roof of the hall was broken off into segments, and he had the whole audience looking up at the roof and using it to sort out marxist categories. White stood up and said: 'Every time I come to Glasgow I feel like a child alongside the Clyde workers. The Clyde workers know all about economics. I know nothing about economics. In my opinion there's too damn much education and too little action.'[74]

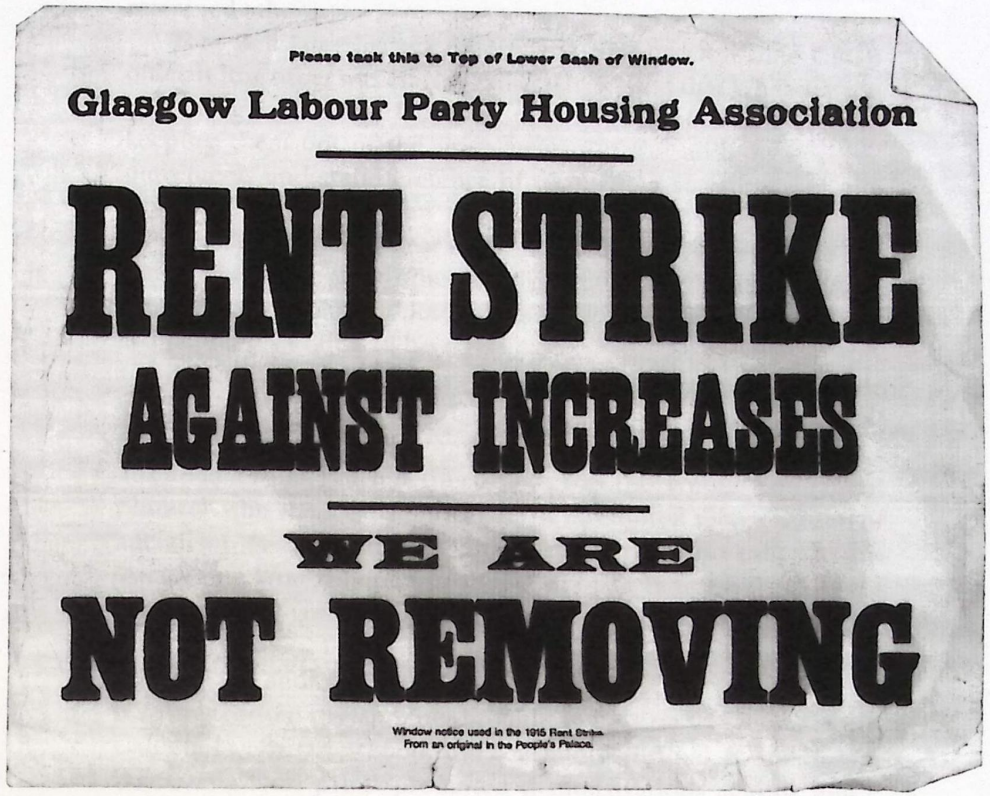
He was the same 'Captain Jack R. White DSO, a Protestant Ulsterman', committed socialist and republican and founder member of the Irish Citizen Army during the Dublin lock-out, alongside James Connolly. It is important to note here White's familiarity both with Glasgow and the radical left.

On Clydeside education was an essential area of activity and the fruits of that were self evident. Intellectual activity was not confined to Clydeside, through in Edinburgh 'Helen MacFarlane, [made] the first English translation of the Communist Manifesto.'

But the primacy of education was not a Scottish peculiarity. Education was central to the SDF at the wider British level and it was central to the socialist movement in general. The list of activists

[73] p20 *No Mean Fighter* by Joan Smith and Harry McShane

[74] p118 *History of the Chartist Movement 1837 - 1854* by R C. Gammage (facsimile edition by Merlin Press, London 1969


Please tack this to Top of Lower Sash of Window.
Glasgow Labour Party Housing Association
RENT STRIKE
AGAINST INCREASES
WE ARE
NOT REMOVING
Window notice used in the 1915 Rent Strike.
From an original in the People's Palace.

Interesting caption ???

who attended classes run by the old SDF socialists contains legendary names on Clydeside and many of them became educators, as well as activists. Maclean and MacDougall came through the SDF educational tradition, as did McManus, Bell, James Messer and Willie Paul who also took classes on aspects of Marxian theory, and from Maclean's classes throughout central Scotland came a host of activists, some from the ILP, including Jimmy Maxton.

The need for appropriate literature was recognised. There was just about no left wing literature available. The early socialists had to do it themselves, not only the printing and publishing but the actual writing. In the latter years of the nineteenth century 'the Labour Literature Society established itself in premises in London Street[?]. In the backshop they installed a printing machine and from this small beginning emerged. . . the Civic Press.'[75] Members of the ILP opened a bookshop in Bothwell Street, flitting to Buchanan Street when larger premises became necessary. Here they published pamphlets, the first by John Wheatley, entitled *How the Miners are Robbed*.[76]

Wheatley's father had been involved in the Irish National League and he himself read widely. Robert Blatchford rather than Karl Marx[77] was his initial influence.[78] Apart from writers of the Rationalist Press, he seems to have read Tolstoy[79] whose influence on the socialist v religion debate extended worldwide. Could there be such a thing as a catholic socialist? Many christians thought so. In 1906 Wheatley formed the Catholic Socialist Society and also held meetings in his home, attended by young men mostly of an Irish Catholic background. Among them were McManus, Bell, Dollan, Willie Paul and John McGovern who met people of a back-

[75] See *No Mean Fighter*. p122

[76] William Martin Haddow, *My Seventy Years* p32

[77] *ibid.*

[78] As with John Maclean.

[79] *ibid.* p36 Middlemas said that 'Like most ILPers [Wheatley] read Marx critically, and though he accepted the theory of value he rejected the materialist conception of history.' But John Hannan, a biographer of Wheatley, dismisses this peremptorily; see p11. But in her biography of John Maclean, Nan Milton says that 'Wheatley was influenced by Marxist teaching, except by the materialist conception of history.' p47

ground similar to their own, in particular James Connolly, Irish Scottish working class Catholic socialist republican.

Even arranging the order of those terms is a tendentious affair. This attempt to reconcile christianity and socialism was attacked on all sides whether by christians or by those who became or remained atheist.

Tom Bell later became one of the first two full time CPGB officials [the other was Harry Pollitt]. He argued that Wheatley was 'gathering. . . a large following of young Catholic workers and keeping them out of the main stream of the militant workers' movement, under the pretence of reconciling socialism with the Church.'[80] Wheatley's son replied that while Bell 'enjoyed the debates. . . [he] came to fear his host's ability to win over to the ILP cause waverers from the other socialist groups.'[81] Wheatley favoured the ILP and certainly opposed the abolition of **all** private property but he was a socialist all his days.

Political debates were always popular on Clydeside and people packed into the meetings. Given that 'the restriction of [CSS] membership to Catholics was reaffirmed'[82] many non-Catholics attended the larger meetings. One was the young Emmanuel Shinwell who was loudly critical of the attempted reconciliation of socialism and religion. At another meeting the talk was on 'Awakening Womanhood. . . [and] a Mrs J.D. Pearce [pleaded] not simply for the vote but for a society of true partnership between men and women. The *Glasgow Observer* noted the presence of 'many ladies in the audience on this occasion.'[83]

Tremendous pressure was brought to bear on socialist-inclined Catholics by the priesthood, and not simply spiritual. In Shettleston Wheatley's local priest promoted demonstrations against him.[84] Among Catholics there were spirited arguments for and against the CSS, and letters to and from newspapers. 'A considerable number of the opponents came from members of the teaching

[80] See his letters for an introduction

[81] p79 *Pioneering Days* [also confirm that McManus went to these meetings]

[82] See Ian Wood's biography p43

[83] p23 see Ian Wood's biography

[84] p23 see Ian Wood's biography, citing the Catholic newspaper *The Glasgow Observer*, 30.11.1907,

profession who were anxious to demonstrate their loyalty [to the Church] because they depended upon clerical favour for advancement.'[85]

Fighting his own corner in Ireland, Connolly had to contend not only with the clergy but with members of the independence movement, nationalists and republicans, who wished to steer clear of the socialist taint. His analytic response could be offered generally:

> socialism was a practical and economic question, a science like pure mathematics, whose validity could be discussed without involving questions of theism, atheism or the dogmas of institutionalised Christianity. Politics. . . was a question of the stomach and not the brain. Socialism and religion could and must coexist.[86]

The argument remains of value, though nowadays a great many socialists reject it, as they rejected it then. Jimmy Maxton, another the ILP-er, thought 'Socialism was a complete philosophy of life extending to all spheres of human relationships and with particular emphasis upon the development of human personality.' The anarchist Guy Aldred also rejected the attempt to reconcile socialism and christianity. He argued that socialism and religion were mutually exclusive: 'socialism. . . was founded on a materialism which explained all abstract ideas and institutions in terms of mother earth. To embrace its teachings was to war against every myth 'from God to captains of industry.'[87] Aldred was much influenced by another Englishman, Richard Carlile, who spent ten years of his life imprisoned on charges relating to sedition and blasphemy. Back in 1820-21, while in prison Carlile essayed on 'the tyranny practised on Ireland by the English Government' and concluded that. . .

> nothing will seriously benefit her that does not root up every part of the system that degrades her, which may be brought under two heads, that of government and that of religion. . . [and] the Protestant Religion of Ireland is as bad as her Roman Catholic Religion, equally persecuting, equally degrading, equally pernicious to the minds of its followers.[88]

Neither Connolly, Wheatley, Maxton nor Maclean appears to have read Carlile. They might well have known of him but where would they have had access to his work? Eventually Aldred published some of it and wrote a biography of him, but he did not come to live in Glasgow until after the 1914-18 war. However, no matter what anti-socialist republicans, anti-socialist christians or even anti-socialist atheists might have had to say on the subject, vital members of the radical and socialist movement were practising christians. At the ILP celebrations following the 1922 General Election thousands sang *The Red Flag*, but finished with *The Lord's Prayer*, both Catholics and protestants. And among the latter was the new MP for Glasgow-Gorbals, ex-Boys Brigade boy George Buchanan.

Among those who condemned Wheatley's project were a number of Catholic socialists. They thought formations like the CSS would split the socialist movement along sectarian lines. James Larkin was critical but later changed his mind. In 1906 he was in Scotland on behalf of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), sent north to organise the ports. Larkin had performed good work in Liverpool and lost his job in consequence. The NUDL had given him this temporary post. In Glasgow he met many people, and became friends with a few. He invited John Maclean to Nothern Ireland 'through the Belfast Socialist Society,'[89] to address the workers during a major industrial action.

This extraordinary strike had a lasting effect on Maclean.[90] No wonder. During the summer of 1907 Larkin 'united the people of Belfast into an effective Labour movement. He had the Catholics and the Protestants, the Orangemen, Hibernians, republicans and

[85] As an exCatholic Hugh Savage said *Ten Years in a Monastery*was an important book for himself.

[86] p35 McGovern, John; *Neither Fear Nor Favour* (Blandford Press 1960)

[87] p20, *No Mean Fighter* by Joan Smith and Harry McShane [Lawrence & Wishart 1975]

[88] *ibid.* p41

[89] Robert Carlile p46 in his essay 'Ireland', in his *Jail Journal, and Other Writings*, edited and arranged by Guy Aldred [Strickland Press 1942]

[90] p34 Nan Milton's *John Maclean*.

socialists all marching together.'[91] It was one of the most significant strikes in British and Irish labour history. 'For generations before Larkin came into their city the working people of Belfast had been murdering and maiming one another in the name of religion.'[92] Not only were Catholic and protestant workers now marching together, an Orange flute band was leading them off.

News of this would have astonished the whole of Ireland and Scotland, never mind the Glasgow socialists, 'against [whose] meetings. . . the delinquent wing of the Orange order campaigned vigorously and violently. . . '[93] The British State, the shipyard owners and other Loyalist authorities were aghast. They believed the protestant working class was their property, the 'Orange card', to be dealt on behalf of the British ruling class wherever and whenever they chose.

But there had been one remarkable outcome to that first postwar General Election: across the Irish Sea, out 'of 105 seats Sinn Féin won 73 [thus] two-thirds of the people. . . had given a clear mandate for the affirmation of the 1916 Republic. . .'[94] And in accordance with that mandate the Sinn Féin MPs did not go to the 'London House of Commons', they formed their own government, Dáil Éireann.

It was a major victory for Sinn Féin and the republican movement and a tremendous blow against British Imperialism. It was a blow also to the supporters of Home Rule. Yet within the British State many authorities, including high-placed members of MI5, found it 'virtually impossible to distinguish between' the republican and Home Rule movements. That would have presented difficulties within Whitehall, given that Home Rule was the ILP position.

Only one year after Sinn Féin had formed Dáil Éireann, in accordance with the wishes of two thirds of the Irish electorate, the British authorities 'suppressed. . . [it] as an 'illegal assembly.'. And they sent in the army to destroy the Irish bid for freedom; they 'poured into Ireland, with tanks, armoured cars, motor lorries and other weapons.'[95]

[91] Milton, Nan, *op. cit.* p35

[92] Boyd, Andrew p79 *The Rise of the Irish Trade Unions* [Anvil Books 1972, reprint 1985]

[93] See p86, 79? Andrew Boyd op. cit.

[94] p31 McShane?

[95] p243 *A History of he Irish Working Class* by Peter Berresford Ellis.

Solidarity for the Irish people was expressed on Clydeside when thousands 'joined the campaign for a British withdrawal and an end to the excesses of Crown forces. . . ' Countess Markiewicz was the main speaker on a platform shared with John Maclean, John Wheatley and others. She had created her own history: the first woman ever elected to the House of Commons. As a member of the Sinn Féin contingent she never took up the seat.

That huge demonstration took place on Glasgow Green 'at the 1919 May Day Rally. . . when Irish tricolours were carried openly among a crowd of 100,000 and the 'Soldier's Song' was sung, as well as 'The Red Flag'.[96] Maclean visited Dublin soon after and 'witnessed the solemn farce of 15,000 soldiers with bayonets fixed, machine guns and tanks, marching through the streets to celebrate peace. . . '[97] The city was full of spies and agents provocateurs. 'Everything conceivable has been done to stir the Irish to open rebellion. . . '[98] The army was waiting for any sign of revolt to crush the Irish people. It was this invasion that led to the birth of the Irish Republican Army, formed from the older Irish Volunteers, and the remnants of the socialist Irish Citizen Army.

It took until the next General Election to get rid of Barnes. This time, in 1922, there was no possibility of Maclean being selected by the Gorbals Labour group. He had been 'slipped out' from the BSP previously. The BSP, and the SLP, formed the nucleus of the new CPGB. Maclean opposed it. He was not alone in that but his was the most prominent name. But he still fought the Gorbals seat. Now as 'a Bolshevik, alias a Communist, alias a Revolutionist, alias a Marxist.'[99] A fair degree of solidarity existed within the Clydeside left but it was important to be clear about where you stood. In the final part of his election address he urged the Gorbals' voters: 'if you cannot agree with me then vote for George Buchanan.'[100] He polled more than 4000 votes which was not a bad result in the circumstances.

[96] *ibid.* p 247-9

[97] See p 29 Ian Wood's biography *John Wheatley.*

[98] p161 John Maclean, *In the Rapids of Revolution.*

[99] See 164 *In the Rapids of Revolutio* for Maclean's catalogue of some of this, published in *The Vanguard* or in pamphlet form.

[100] Maclean *op. cit* p234

Arrests at the 1919 'Bloody Friday' demonstration in Glasgow.
Willie Gallacher is in bandages and David Kirkwood is held by police.

By now Maclean had endured five terms of imprisonment and still had one to go. He had been granted political-prisoner status on the fifth occasion thus food and clothing were allowed in from the outside. McShane organised that until he too was imprisoned. Jimmy Maxton of the ILP was supposed to take over the duties but it never worked properly because Maxton 'was never any good at organising.'[101] While in prison McShane had much to think about. He was impressed by the support given to prisoners by members of the newly formed Communist Party. When eventually released he had made the decision, he joined the Party. It caused a major breach between himself and Maclean, his close friend and comrade.[102] A year later Maclean was dead, at the age of forty four. The photographs taken of him from this period show a man who looks twenty years older.

If the Gorbals electorate had returned Maclean in 1922 he would have taken the Sinn Féin route and not gone 'to the London House of Commons.' He would have stayed home and fought for 'a Scottish workers' republic.'[103] Most Scottish socialists favoured a form of self government. This had been the case since the early days of Keir Hardie and 'Don Roberto' Cunningham-Graham, although the latter moved from the Home Rule position to Scottish Nationalism. When the ILP 'introduced the Government of Scotland Bill'[104] it was the new MP for Gorbals who performed the introduction.

Geordie Buchanan was a local man, and popular; ex-Boys Brigade, known for his prowess at billiards and his skills on the poker table.[105] While in London he, Maxton and Campbell Stephen shared digs for years. They were members of the ILP group that stormed Whitehall, winning ten out of fifteen Glasgow seats. Two Communists were returned as MPs that same year: 'Shapurji Saklatvala, a Bombay Parsee who won Battersea North. . . as an official Labour Party candidate [and] Walton Newbold. . . for Motherwell' who stood 'as a Communist but without Labour opposition.'[106]

[101] Maclean *op. cit.* p238

[102] McShane

[103] He enters into detail of this in *No Mean Fighter*.

[104] p238 *In the Rapids of Revolution*.

[105] p73 Knox *op. cit.*

[106] See Knox for this information

Buchanan had been a Councillor before going to Whitehall and had gained very useful experience 'representing the most impoverished and disabled of his constituents at welfare and pension tribunals. . . [and became] a master of the intricacies of the codes and regulations governing the payment of welfare benefits.'[107] Eventually he was 'accepted by the Labour Party and sometimes by the Government as the spokesman of the unemployed.'[108]

But he had to deal capably with the day-to-day issues confronting his constituents. One of whom was Harry McShane. The ILP man had the reputation of being 'fearless', except when it came to McShane.[109] He remained Gorbals MP until 1948. By then he had resigned from the ILP and become a member of the Labour Party. It was his acceptance of a ministerial position that caused the by-election that resulted in Hugh Savage becoming a paid official for the one and only time in his life.

Shortly before the 1922 election a final decision was taken to form the CPGB at a Unity Convention held in1921. The two main parties were the BSP and the SLP. A cautionary note on the adulation then heaped upon Lenin was urged by Willie Paul, a well-kent figure from the 'impossibilist' days of the SDF: 'Lenin is no Pope or God.'[110] Following an earlier Unity Convention in Glasgow comment appeared in the *Worker* published in October 1920, and the writer probably its editor John S Clarke: 'It is fairly evident that to many Communists Russia is not a country to learn from, but a sacrosanct Holy of Holies to grovel before as a pious Mohammedan faces the Mecca in his prayers.'[111] Clarke's 'notion of socialism as a crusade of liberation made him among the first to be disenchanted with Russia as Stalin rose to power. . . He would ask questions such as: have peoples' lives become easier? do workers control production? are they free from exploitation? When the answers he received were unsatisfactory he broke with his old pal Willie Gallacher.'[112]

[107] See p25 Pelling, Henry *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* [A and C Black Ltd. 1958]

[108] p71 Knox *op. cit.*

[109] p280 Middlemas *op. cit.*

[110] p190 Middleman *op. cit.*

[111] 10 Pelling

[112] 11 Pelling cites *Worker* (Glasgow) 2 October 1920

After Lenin came Joseph Stalin but in the early 1920s, even before Lenin's death, the numbing intellectual control by Comintern was already being exercised. In fact it had been institutionalised: 'All the decisions of the congresses of the Communist International, as well as the decisions of its Executive Committee, are binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International.'[113] It was like a form of death to the intellect for radicals from the earlier period and a far cry from the great debates heard on Clydeside.

Nevertheless the CPGB 'reshaped' itself accordingly.[114] Sylvia Pankhurst's voice was one of the loudest in condemnation of what was happening. She was well-known on Clydeside and friendly with local socialists. She and Helen Crawford teamed up for the visit to Moscow in 1920 for the Second Congress of the Communist International. But as Hugh Savage tells us, Sylvia had other connections to the area, her brother lived in Glasgow and was known within the eastend weaving community.

> I wonder how the owners of Strang's cotton-mills in Greenhead Street would have reacted if they had known that the well-spoken woman who spent some time with the weavers, taking sketches of them at their looms, was Sylvia Pankhurst and that the senior tenor in their mill was the brother of the famous – or infamous – suffragette, depending on your point of view.[115]

One grandfather of the Pankhurst children had been a cotton spinner in Salford, Lancashire. Their father Richard was a member of the ILP from the earliest years. Their mother was Emily. 'When other children were demanding a pretty doll or a lollipop. . . the cry of the Pankhurst children was 'Take me to a meeting!' '[116] Emily Pankhurst spoke at a meeting in Clydebank, chaired by the 'redoubtable' Jane Rae who had been to the fore at the great Singers' strike of 1911.

Sylvia Pankhurst was expelled from the CPGB. Meanwhile Comintern continued its criticism of 'the British party [where] there

[113] McShane

[114] p18 Pelling, citing Degras (ed.) *C.I. Documents*, 1, 171

[115] 21 Pelling

[116] See note 23 of *Memoir*

is a sort of special system which may be characterized thus: the party is a society of great friends.'[117]

But those forming the leadership of the party had come through much together and bonds forged through earlier struggle remained crucial. People like Maxton, Agnes and Paddy Dollan, Maclean and Wheatley were accorded respect. '[The] old Clydeside group, especially McManus, Campbell, and Bell, formed a hard core of influential officials, controlling the party with the assistance of. . . Albert Inkpin [and] a few newcomers. . . [including] Arthur Horner.'[118] Other Clydeside party members were Helen Crawford, Willie Gallacher, Harry McShane and Willie Paul. They had to become accustomed to shifts in policy or tactics at a quite fundamental level, not to mention an organisational structure which was, quite literally, foreign. But some took to it, and most coped; very few resigned.

Although he was the CP's first Chairman Arthur McManus fails to rate one solitary mention in the most recent history of communism in Britain.[119] He occupies a primary position in the radical history of Clydeside. Following a period of imprisonment he died at the age of 38 and his ashes are buried in the Kremlin Wall. He was on the executive committee of Comintern but was already being seen as awkward, as somebody who asked questions. During the 1914-18 war, when James Larkin was domiciled in the US, he published the US edition of the *Irish Worker*. News from the Clydeside industrial and anti-war front reached US socialists through this and other channels.[120] One account published in a socialist journal 'offered the observation that Arthur McManus and John Maclean stood 'at the left of the Left of the British Labour Movement.'[121] His short life is the stuff of legend and it is suprising

[117] *Votes for Women* by Roger Fulford p106.

[118] p46 Pelling.

[119] *ibid.* Hugh Savage rated Horner the most powerful orator he ever heard.

[120] Neither does Tom Bell, one of the first two full-time officials. The book is *Under the Red Flag; a History of Communism in Britain* by Keith Laybourn & Dylan Murphy [Sutton Publishing Ltd. 1999). Tom Bell does not rate a mention.

[121] See p15-24 on James D.Young's Introduction to his *John MacLean, Clydeside Socialist* (Clydeside Press 1992).

no biography of the man has been undertaken. Maybe it has and just never been published. His good friend Helen Crawford wrote her autobiography which exists in manuscript form only.[122]

By 1928 'the Comintern officials. . . were already fashioning an alternative leadership for the British party [and] wished in particular to reduce the influence of Campbell, who. . . had become the party's most prominent member, especially after the death of McManus in 1927.' The membership of the CP had peaked at nearly 11,000 the year before. From now on it dropped and did not recover until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.[123] Comintern sought to impose a more malleable leadership and made use of the Young Communist League 'which had assumed the role of Comintern watchdog.'[124] The older brigade did not capitulate at once but eventually were removed from power; one of their 'serious errors' was to have 'been too sympathetic to non-Commuinist 'left wingers' such as Maxton and [A.J.] Cook'[125] the miners' leader.

A new breed of party workers came to the fore and some would be employed as full-time officials. These were 'for the most part ambitious young men of working class origin who had never had any other political allegiance than that of International Communism. . . very different types from the Scottish artisans.'[126] Peter Kerrigan was one such. He became Scottish Secretary, National Organiser then Industrial Organiser. He had been Chairman of the Glasgow Central Strike Co-ordination Committee in 1926[127] then on the executive1927-29, 1931 to 1965. There were rumours about his conduct when 'a political commissar' during the Spanish Civil War and he was said to have taken part in some dubious practices.[128] John McGovern suggested 'that Peter Kerrigan was never in the International Brigade, never fought in Spain and was there only representing the *Daily Worker*.' [129] However, Harry

[122] Crystal Eastman, sister of Max, cited by James D.Young p18, *ibid.*

[123] in the Mitchell Library. She and McManus were good friends.

[124] 192 Pelling's Appendix A.

[125] 50 Pelling.

[126] 51 Pelling, citing *Inprecorr*, ix, 885.

[127] 51 Pelling.

[128] Succeeding Jock McBain, another CP founder member.

[129] I heard this said about him myself, directly from Ned Donaldson.

McShane went out of his way to refute the worst allegations.[130]

During the Spanish Civil War period 'the Catholic Church was speaking up for the. . . fascists' and McShane debated the issue on numerous occasions, including 'four. . . with H.W. Henderson around 1936.'[131] 'H.W.' was the brother of Arnold Henderson, a highly respected member of the CP and well-known on Clydeside. Hugh Savage came to know Arnold personally when he worked beside him on the Clyde.[132] But his brother H.W. was editor of the right wing *Common Cause* magazine and wrote pamphlets and tracts such as, *What Are Russia's Ultimate Aims?* He published the pamphlets himself, printed by Burns of Buccleuch Street, then publisher for the Roman Catholic church in Glasgow.

The 1939-45 war was a difficult period for CP members with its major shifts in policy. During the 1930s communists and the left in general had been to the fore in their denunciation of fascism. Many fought and died to defend the Spanish Republic. But now the Moscow hierarchy 'denounced the War as an imperialist war'. It caused consternation in Britain and the breaking of ranks in the most senior positions. Harry Pollitt, a paid official since the formation of the party, was relieved of his full-time position. The same happened to another veteran, John R. Campbell.

But the shift in policy was a grave problem for young activists like Hugh Savage. His 'first political activity as a new Communist was advancing the call for a People's Peace, with negotiations with Germany and Hitler.' Unfortunately most men around the Clyde shipyards, including communists, had relations, friends or acquaintances in the armed forces. Some had suffered bereavement. Now the CP was as good as telling them it was in vain and Hugh had to dodge when a heavy spanner was flung at his head.

Ironically, had this policy not then been in operation one of the turning points on Clydeside would not have occurred: the great apprentices' strike of 1941. Moscow's opposition to the war at that particular period *allowed* the CP membership to support the striking apprentices.

[130] 113 McGovern, quoting Fred Copeman.

[131] p223 McShane.

[132] McShane in *No Mean Fighter*.

Hugh downplays his own part in the strike. He was not an apprentice but a young journeyman plumber and welder, and his role was governed by that. Aged 23 he was close to the apprentices and pals with a few, including young communists like Johnnie Moore, a strike leader. Strategical matters were the business of the apprentices' own strike committee. Hugh is very clear on that point. However, he was crucially involved. This was demonstrated by the shameful behaviour of the British State, acting on behalf of the shipyard owners. Hugh and Johnnie Moore were conscripted into the army and destined for the front line. This happened to other militant workers when employers wanted rid of them. It made no difference that they worked in a proscribed industry. The political authorities were as attentive to the demands of big business then as they are now. Hugh had little doubt that he and Moore would have been killed had older and more experienced trade unionists not challenged the authorities on their behalf:

> I really did not suspect a thing if it had not been for the others, maybe especially when I saw the determination on Bob McLennan's face that morning and then when he said to us 'The bastards are not going to murder any workers from John Brown's.'[133]

The apprentices' strike of 1941 may have been the most significant industrial action during the war years but another took place in 1943-44, again on the Clyde. A youth by the name of Robert Lynn was involved. He was serving his time as an engineer in Yarrows shipyard. Unfortunately for him and the other striking apprentices, the 1943-44 dispute followed another 'complete turn-about in the Communist Party's policy'. The German army had advanced on Russia and the Moscow line immediately returned to 'resistance to Fascism'. Now 'the CP vied with the employees in the ferocity of their denunciation of workers taking industrial action'[134] and. . .

> entirely supported war production in favour of increasing capitalist production [and] didn't support

[133] See Hugh Savage's *Memoir.*

[134] See *Memoir*, p ???

> strikes. . . By the end of the war the. . . Party was completely tied up in supporting the Coalition Government's policies [and] demanded the continuation of a National Government including 'progressive' Tories like Churchill and Eden [which] was an amazing suggestion [because] Churchill had always been the villain of the socialist movement.[135]

The apprentices who did not belong to the Communist Party were left battling the shipyard employers on their own. The absence of solidarity meant none of the Party's leading young members could lend support to the strike, even though many were apprentices themselves. Hugh never alludes to the 1943-44 strike in his *Memoir*.

But that turn-around in party policy had a long-standing affect on the apprentices of the time. Lynn said that 'the Communist Party. . . opposition alienated me and numerous other young people.'[136] From then until his death he remained a stalwart of Glasgow's anarchist network, a familiar figure around the Glasgow Cross and Calton area.[137] Lynn was never a regular in the Workers City group but he came along to a few of their activities. I met him on Glasgow Green in the late 1990s, not long before he died. He was on his way back from a Sunday Mayday. Other socialists too were leaving early. The platform had been dominated mainly by Labour Party hacks or trade union officials. When Workers' City was around a couple of years earlier Hugh and others had organised an open platform, so anybody could speak, a most unusual concept then as now. They also organised an alternative Mayday, one that took place on the first working day of the month.

When Geordie Buchanan finally resigned the seat for Glasgow-Gorbals in 1948 the CPGB put up an unsuccessful fight against the

[135] See p29 essay by Peter Bain and Tommy Gorman, 'Keeping the Home Fires Burning: the Albion Shop Stewards in the Second World War', in *Fighting the Good Fight? Socialist History 7* [Pluto Press 1995].

[136] p236-38 *No Mean Fighter,* Harry McShane and Joan Smith (Pluto Press 1975).

[137] 'Not a Life, Just a Leaf from it', essay by Robert Lynn; *Workers City* [Clydeside Press 1988].

next Labour candidate. The man whom the CP hierarchy selected as candidate was Peter Kerrigan. Hugh Savage became his election agent.

In that capacity Hugh was often in Gorbals and there met up with Harry McShane, then living in a room and kitchen flat attached to the local CP office. McShane was a nationally-known figure, and had been for twenty years. Within socialist circles he had been known as an activist for much longer than that. Until making McShane's acquaintance Hugh Savage described himself as 'a good wee Stalinist.' It is no exaggeration to say that the course of his life now altered. A friendship developed that lasted all of forty years, right until McShane's death at the age of 96.

Peter Kerrigan also had been involved in the Hunger Marches. He and McShane had known each other since the mid-1920s and the pair had collided on numerous occasions. At this late stage McShane remained a thorn in the flesh of the CP hierarchy, whereas Kerrigan had been a party man through and through. Another Irishman, Dominic Behan, brother of Brendan, lived in Glasgow for many years and tells of the time he, Freddie Anderson and Matt McGinn. . .

> noticing that the comrades in London had made a mistake in their all-embracing philosophies, went to London to put the matter to rights. At King Street we asked to see the leader to point out that the 'British Road to Socialism' said nothing about Maclean or self determination. And that grand old Scottish rebel, Peter Kerrigan, who had fought for the Spanish Republic, met us at the door and said 'Fuck off you chauvinist anti-British bastards!'[138]

The successful Labour candidate at the 1948 polls was Alice Mooney, nicknamed 'Silent Alice' through her ability to say nothing, a respected quality in Labour Party circles.

In 1950 Hugh Savage was nominated CP candidate for Dalmarnock in the city's municipal elections. Two years later he, Leslie Forster, Ned Donaldson, Matt McGinn and Bill McCulloch had

[138] See also Stuart Christie for further information on Lynn in Vol 1 his autobiography, *My Grannie Made Me An Anarchist: The Christie File: Part 1, 1946-1964* [Christie Books 2002].

resigned from the Communist Party. McShane followed soon after. Forster refers to one significant incident that had occured during

> . . . a keynote speech made by Bill Lauchlan, the Scottish Secretary. . . at a Scottish Congress of the CP held in Glasgow. When he finished his peroration, delegates stood up clapping again and again in praise of the Messiah. During this display of adoration Ned Danaldson and Hugh Savage remained seated. . . [139]

Such behaviour was seen as subversive. Anyone who asked the 'wrong' question was subversive.

Roundabout then Forster travelled to England as a delegate from the building workers to the Trades Union Congress in Blackpool. During the trip he palled up with two delegates from Glasgow, one a Trotskyist the other an Anarchist. They had long conversations. What a freedom! It could not have happened at home. To chat to another socialist who was not in the CP! Somebody who saw the world differently yet still from a left perspective. It was exciting. It had never happened before. Meeting left wing activists from outside the party was an unusual event, being able to talk to them was even more unusual, to discuss theoretical mattter was just not done. The memory of the conversations Les Forster shared with the two men stayed with him. He felt he 'owe[d] them a debt for blowing the cobwebs from my mind.'[140]

Sectarianism among socialists, where it is not based on selfish motivation or in blind allegiance to a leadership, can derive from straight ignorance. But this ignorance is not necessarily the fault of the individual.

But it was McShane's resignation that caused the furore. Even in Scotland's populist press, news of it was carried as a front page story. McShane was a journalist on the Communist *Daily Worker* and a nationally-known figure, one of the more prominent Communists in the UK. His role on the Hunger Marches and within the NUWM especially brought him to national prominence. He was now over 60 years of age and forced to seek manual work:

[139] See his essay 'Call me Comrade', in *Workers City; the Real Glasgow Stands Up* [Clydeside Press 1988].

[140] See *Rocking the Boat* p50 [Clydeside Press 1996?].

> For eight months after. . . I couldn't get a job. One was at a place I had applied to before the first world war, when I was put on a short-list of six out of fifty applicants [and] asked what school I went to; it was a Catholic school, and of course I didn't get the job. [Now] in 1953 they took me round and showed me the engine and I was quite entranced with the job. Then they asked me where I had been employed before and I said the *Daily Worker* – and that was it for the second time. . . [141]

It was a very difficult time for him financially and at one stage he had a run-in over a matter to do with pensions and the social security department of the time. He challenged the findings of the officials that had led to an unfair cut in his income and very soon a decision came in his favour. The decision had come from the very top, and the man who held the top ministerial post at that time was his old adversary, Geordie Buchanan.[142]

The resignations of the group caused a sensation in left wing circles. Les Forster tells of 'a meeting in Bill McCulloch's house, along with Hugh Savage, Matt McGinn, Harry McShane. . . we were paid a visit by the Trotskyist leader Gerry Healy. . . to recruit every one of us into his Movement. He even had in his pocket a Press statement, announcing that we had thrown in our lot with The Workers' Revolutionary Party.'[143] They met with bitter hostility from the CP itself. Forty years later they still faced hostility. And exactly the same question was being put to them: 'Why did you leave the Party?' Such 'disloyalty' was unforgiveable. Meanwhile others on the left were condemning the group as Stalinists. For the purposes of this *Memoir* there is included as its final section an essay Hugh wrote for a commemorative work on McShane.[144]

1948 was the same year Eric Heffer was expelled from the CPGB. He wrote to McShane following his resignation. . .

[141] See *Rocking the Boat* p50 [Clydeside Press 1996?].

[142] *No Mean Fighter p255?*

[143] Les Forster gave me this information.

[144] *Rocking the Boat* p60

[145] *ibid. Militant Worker, Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900 - 1950, Essays in Honour of Harry McShane [1891-1988]*, edited by Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor [John Donald 1992].

> indicating that I agreed with his public statement and [McShane] came down to Liverpool and stayed a few days at my house. . . Harry [had] left the CP with a number of younger colleagues and they formed the Clyde Socialist Action Group. On Merseyside a number of us had got together and we had formed the Socialist Educational Group. . . comrades like I. P. Hughes, Neil Beresford, R. G. Bale and S. Sheldon. When Harry came. . . we discussed the political situation and what we thought should be done. We agreed that efforts should be made to get the various groups together and that we should organise a conference to this end in Liverpool. This was ultimately held on 17 – 18 July 1954.[145]

At the age of 63 McShane was 'back on the tools'. He returned to Marx, especially the first volume of *Kapital*, to look at things on the basic level again. Surely 'Marxism was nothing if not a theory of liberation" and has to offer working class people a different way of living. McShane was a great reader of Adam Smith. In Hugh's effects was a well-thumbed copy of an essay by Ronald Meek. In it Meek comments on Adam Smith that "the more narrowly economic views of *The Wealth of Nations* have usually been emphasised at the expense of the general sociological system of which they were essentially a part."[146] It is consistent with McShane's argument on the need to remember the humanist side of Marxism.

In USA the philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya had been developing her own thinking, '[showing] Humanism to be the red thread connecting all four decades of Marx's development. . . '[147]

[146] See Heffer's essay 'Harry McShane and the Socialist Workers Federation', written for the Militant Workers anthology (p20-21). Heffer was one of the contributors to the socialist journal along with McShane, Savage, Forster, Donaldson and McCulloch.

[147] Ronald L.Meek's article was published in pamphlet form in the mid-1950s.

[148] See the essay by Peter Hudis, 'Harry McShane and the Scottish Roots of Marxist-Humanism' in *Militant Worker, Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950, Essays in Honour of Harry McShane [1891-1988]*, edited by Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor [John Donald 1992].

McShane was intrigued by her ideas and corresponded with her: 'I kept reading all I could get my hands on and finally came to the conclusion that you were correct.'[148]

The correspondence between McShane and Dunayevskaya endured from 1959 until 1983 and provides 'the core of The Harry McShane Collection 1959-1988: Scottish Marxist-Humanism's Development in Dialogue with Raya Dunayevskaya, which is deposited at The National Museum of Labour History in Manchester.[150]

Dunayevskaya, former secretary of Trotsky, was Chairperson of *News and Letters* Committees and occasionally, when in Britain, she stayed at Hugh Savage's home in the eastend of Glasgow. Amongst Hugh's personal effects is her card of condolence following the tragic death of his youngest son.

In recent years good work has been done in reclaiming aspects of Clydeside's radical history. Of course the history-revision industry is also an employer. Some have 'denied the existence of Red Clydeside', which is rather a peculiar action. Others have denied the deniers. This debate is little more than a red herring and takes us from the history itself. It is of more value to get a proper line on that. Nor should we let the academics do it alone, even well-intentioned academics, those whose quackatatory travails in paradigmatic

[149] *ibid.* The preoccupation with what Leon Trotsky called 'the small coin of concrete questions' has ever been the road away, not from the Mystical Absolutes of Hegel, but from the revolutionary principles of Marx. It was so during the life of the Second International. It characterized the Third International following the death of Lenin. The theoretic void in the Marxist movement has persisted to this day, when mindless activism thinks it is the answer to today's hunger for theory. . . It has always been my belief that in our age theory can develop fully only when grounded in what the masses themselves are doing and thinking.[149]

[150] See the introduction to her *Philosophy and Revolution; From Hegel to Sartre, and from Marx to Mao* [Delacorte Press, 1973].

[151] See the essay by Peter Hudis, 'Harry McShane and the Scottish Roots of Marxist-Humanism' in *Militant Worker, Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950, Essays in Honour of Harry McShane [1891-1988]*, edited by Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor [John Donald 1992].

and contextual connotatory provinces can leave the rest of us gasping.

For people such as Savage, McLaren, Forster and their contemporaries the socialist tradition was fundamental; without a good working knowledge of this, really, there was no place to go. There in an extensive bibliography offered here and other sources should be accessed.

On a personal level Hugh Savage had a great regard for performance art-forms like music and drama, and a fondness for show-business and show-business characters. He enjoyed anecdotes and stories about individuals, whether hearing them or narrating them. He was known also for his 'strong tongue' and you were advised not to get on the wrong end of it. On one occasion a newspaper carried a report on a confrontation the City administration had suffered with Workers' City; the headline read 'Savaged'.

He had another close friend, close canine friend. Even for a Rotweiler Rory was massive. Hugh had trained the dog to be suspicious of anybody wearing a suit. That helped when Poll Tax officers and other authority figures came unannounced to the door. Also the Rotweiler was prone to jealousy. If anybody looked twice at his pal one of those deep gurgling growls came from the dog's throat. It was a distinctive gurgle, like the last drops of some poor guy's blood were being swirled about. On one occasion during the Workers' City days *The Keelie* was targeting suspected political corruption in a Glasgow district. It was rumoured that a few heavies were going to disrupt one of the editorial meetings and sort everybody out. Hugh shrugged. When the night arrived he brought along Rory. When the heavy squad came in he would shut the door and let loose the dog. None of the local heavy squad arrived so who knows what would have happened.

On occasion one had to travel as a passenger in Hughie's car; humans on the front seat, Rotweilers to the rear. And the tongue lolling a few inches from your neck. If forced to speak you tried to do so without moving your jaw. His method of restraining the dog was to call at him and grasp him by the neck. He was a strong man but in view of his age there was an outside chance he might be unable to restrain Rory's almighty lungings.

I included footnotes to his *Memoir* to give additional detail to the political context, and a bibliography that contains material readers unfamiliar with local radical history will want to discover for themselves. Like his close friend Leslie Forster, Hugh's conversation was crammed full of the names of known and unknown socialists. Their knowledge has been inspirational for myself.

Leslie has been a constant support throughout the long period I took to deliver the finished work. Other friends who have aided its progress include Laureen and Scott Savage who found patience to cope with the delays; also my wife Marie, Tommy Gorman, Brendan McLaughlin, Euan Sutherland, William Clark and the late Ned Donaldson.

Many of the books used in reference come from Hugh's own library and this includes some from James McLaren's fine collection. McLaren died from tuberculosis back in 1947, still in his 20s. Included in the addenda is a short section on him. He and Leslie Forster belonged to the Central Branch of the CPGB. McLaren was a high-flyer and already holding office. He was Treasurer to the City Communist Party Committee while Secretary of his local branch, and an all-round activist according to his friends: organiser, motivator, orator, campaigner, as well as theoretician and educator. Hugh cherished scraps of his friend's lecture notes and commentaries.

Hugh wanted a title for his *Memoir* that would detract from the idea that he himself was of any importance and suggested we call it, 'Born Up a Close' for that very reason. Les Forster disagreed vehemently and chose the quotation from Thomas Paine, and Tommy Gorman backed him up. I think Laureen and Scott agreed but were too considerate of my feelings to tell me.

But it nagged at Hugh he was writing such a thing. His life was no more worthy than anybody else's. He described himself as a 'foot-soldier'. Sometimes he was reluctant to discuss the project, it embarassed him. At rare times it excited him. The political years during World War II is of obvious interest but so too is the story of Hughie's early years. It is a fine account of what it was to be an ordinary boy growing up in the 1920s and 30s. He had little interest in his own feelings, at least not in print. This account of his early years was never to do with his importance or otherwise, it was for the historical record; it is the information that is crucial, part of our radical history here on Clydeside.

Hugh Savage seated with son Scott on a float for a May Day demonstration in Glasgow 1957

Preface

IT WAS not without a great deal of persuasion that I decided to put my experiences into print, going back over a fifty year period in the social, industrial and political field. I am not a great writer, not even a writer at all, but it is time the voices of the footsloggers were heard rather than the generals. Like hundreds of other workers I never had the ambition nor desire to be any kind of leader. It was always exhilarating for me when the ordinary working class won even a small victory over the employing class, more so when there was an advance of democratic rights.

My philosophy has always been that the struggle to emancipate the people from the rotten and corrupt chains of the present system is greater than the personality or ambition of any leader, or any party, or indeed any government. I have the greatest hatred for a system that denies there is any such thing as society in the real sense of what that means; a system that denies responsibility for millions of unemployed people, that accepts no liability for a million homeless people, that discards school-leavers, forcing them onto the scrapheap without any means of support, that deprives old-age pensioners of more than £80 million by changing the method of assessment so that 11 million pensioners now have the lowest pensions in Europe. It is a system that shows absolutely no concern for the health of the people, no concern that diseases such as tuberculosis are once more back on the agenda, that practises the philosophy of greed and encourages the triumph of the powerful. Those responsible have squandered our oil and gas resources before selling them to their friends in the city, creating private monopolies in Telecommunications, Gas, Water and Electricity.

These are the same Houses of Parliament that legalised the plundering of a quarter of the world's territories, colonised India, Australia, Canada, the West Indies and America. They enslaved millions of African people, took them in chains to their plantations

in the American continent. Ethnic cleansing did not begin with Hitler, Stalin or in the former Yugoslavia, the British aristocracy and ruling class started it more than two hundred years ago – ask the Scottish, Irish and Welsh people. Not only did they steal whole countries and continents they now stand exposed as having sent children from Britain after World War I to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, both to work on farms as slave labour while at the same time trying to populate these colonies with 'good white people'.

The most damning hypocrisy of all came from the various religious orders, churches and organisations who participated in enslaving whole nations. They blessed the troops before they went abroad to plunder the world, and built their churches on the captured soil. Christian organisations were further entangled in schemes to steal these young children and the deceit they used cannot be allowed to be covered up. The same organisations wonder why people have turned their backs on religion, why a variety of denominations and churches are closing down, why there is such a dearth of priests within the Roman Catholic church, why many of those who begin fail to complete their training.

After such damning exposure of religion down through the centuries one would think another way could be tried by people. What is wrong with the humanism of the early socialists, the syndicalists who preached cooperation rather than confrontation, those who sought truth rather than miracles. Along with religion, nationality and race have been used deliberately to divide and keep people apart.

Above all I despise the so-called Labour leaders who give credibility to a corrupt parliamentary system. This system only functions because the Loyal Opposition participates, giving the cloak of respectability to reactionary laws that have set the Labour movement back by a hundred years or more. Is it not a fact that the purpose of creating the Labour Party was to abolish capitalism, not to save it? One thing is for sure, it was never intended that the workers should make sacrifices to defend a system that robs them from the cradle to the grave.

I am a Marxist and was a member of the Communist Party for a number of years, and some reference has been made here to Russia. While I was educated at the various classes I attended after joining the Party, I was never happy about the continual worship of everything that emanated from there. I joined the Party through struggle, because I believed its members were involved in fighting for the working class, and I had difficulty in defending aspects of Russian policy. I did not visit Russia and never had the inclination to do so. But hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of trade union delegates and party members did do so, and returned lavishing praise on its achievements. I wonder what they have to say at the present time? We became familiar with the following quotation of Lenin. How does it stand now in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Man's dearest possession is life, therefore you must so live as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose, so live that you can say all my life is dedicated to the liberation of mankind.

Hugh Savage with Rory

Photo taken outside in the street at the conference of the Socialist Labour Party in Edinburgh in 1935. Note the street children at either side of the member group. Glasgow was a major centre of activists in the SLP.

Part I

Local History, Family History

BRIGTON (or Bridgeton) is one of the oldest districts in Glasgow and many city institutions began there. In 1461 James Lord Hamilton bestowed a grant of property and Glasgow University was created on the site which is nowadays the disused College goods station, right on the Bridgeton boundary. It is ironic that James Watt, inventor of the steam engine, had a workshop within its halls. The university survived the ravages of the Reformation and in later years Professor Adam Smith taught there. The rafters in the old Common Hall rang to the voices of the famous, and Lord Rectors Burke, Peel and Macaulay addressed the students.

While James Watt was born in Greenock he will always be associated with Glasgow Green, one of the oldest common greens[1] in the land. It is generally accepted that the grant by James 11 to Bishop Turnbull in 1450 was the beginning of Glasgow Green as we know it today. But there is evidence that the tract of ground known as Kinclaith was church property prior to 1116 and was used by the people as a common green. Kinclaith is opposite Monteith Row – now Weavers' Court – and reaches down to the Clyde, lying between the Doulton Fountain and the gymnasium, extending north to Charlotte Street via the People's Palace.

James Watt first visited Glasgow at the age of 13. Later he started as an apprentice spectacle-maker and set up business in the Saltmarket, selling maps and making fiddles, flutes and guitars. He did not have an ear for music although he was familiar with harmony. He could turn his hand to anything and among other work was commissioned to build a barrel-organ for a Masonic Lodge. In 1766 he built an organ for St. Andrews Church. It was only used once, on the 23rd August 1807, when it was interdicted by the

[1] 'The Records of Glasgow Green are among the oldest existing records of Glasgow. The earliest known document is the *Notitia*, or Inquest of David, attested before the judges in the year 1120. (see John Taylor Caldwell's essay 'The Battle for the Green' contained in the *Workers' City* anthology.)

Presbytery. The invitation of Adam Smith for Watt to occupy a small building on the grounds of Glasgow University in High Street was extremely important. It was there he met Joseph Black, lecturer in chemistry. Black's discovery of the principle of latent heat could be held to have led to the breakthrough for Watt's theory of a separate condenser which resulted in the successful invention of his steam engine.

Bridgeton was an industrial district. The growth of the Colonial trade and influence of Glasgow's merchants saw the booming imports of raw materials like tobacco and cotton which, in the 18th century, led to a tremendous growth of factories and weaving mills. Apart from the district of Anderston there were more cotton mills in Brigton than anywhere else in the city. Later more industries arrived, names like Beardmore's and Dixon's iron and steel manufacturers; White's chemical works, Mavor and Coulson's engineers, Sir William Arrol's bridge builders, Templeton's carpet-makers; along with leather works like Dick's balata belts, the Scotia works in Boden Street etc. All were within walking distance of the thousands of workers pouring into the city from the Scottish highlands and from Ireland.

The population of Glasgow rose from 42,832 in 1780 to 274,324 in 1841, a large proportion of whom were Irish refugees escaping from the Famine. It was reported that of the 1000 destitute people sleeping on the streets 30% were Irish. The Irish population in the Calton in 1819 was 21.73% and in Bridgeton 12.1%. People from other parts of Scotland amounted to 54.84% of the Calton population and 40.59% in Bridgeton. The living conditions of the people in the city's east end were described in the following terms:

> I have seen human degradation in some of its worst phases both in England and abroad, but I can advisedly say that I did not believe, until I visited the wynds of Glasgow, that so large an amount of filth, crime, misery and disease existed on one spot in any civilised country.[2]

The Gallowgate was first mentioned in 1325 and in 1544 the Battle of the Butts took place on the ground occupied by the old Barracks and the Cattle Market to the north of the Calton. The Earls Lennox and Glencairn, supported by the townsmen, fought against the Earl of Arran's army. Three hundred were killed on either side and sixteen leading citizens were hanged afterwards. At the battle of Vittria in 1813, during the Indian campaign, Colonel Cadogan led the HLI regiment (the Highland Light Infantry) with the cry: 'Come on lads, charge them down the Gallowgate.'

As early as 1175 King William the Lion opened a market at the Glasgow Cross end of Gallowgate, and another later on the old Glasgow Green, between Saltmarket and Stockwell bridges. A painting by William Walton of the fair held there could be seen hanging in the Banqueting Hall in the City Chambers.

The Calton (which means Hazel-grove) is one of the oldest districts in Glasgow and was first named in 1722. Its original name was Blackfaulds and until the Glasgow Council development around 1977 there was a street of that name facing Abercromby Street. Although small this was one of the busiest streets in the Calton, housing the premises of Dunn & Moore, the soft drinks' manufacturer. It ran into Canning Street which nowadays is called London Road.

The lands of Blackfaulds were owned by the church until annexed by the Crown in 1587, passing through several hands before reaching John Walkinshaw, a Renfrewshire laird. Walkinshaw's daughter was the famous Clementina, mistress of Bonnie Prince Charlie and she went to France in 1745. John Walkinshaw's grandfather was imprisoned during the 1715 rising.

There was a Calton Loch adjacent to Hunter Street and the rear of the old Glasgow University. Hayracks were seen in the Trongate in 1795 and as late as 1890 pigs wandered Tontine Close. The boundaries of the Calton village were indefinite but in 1817 George III granted a charter to Esther and Martha Ray, and Robert and William Pollock, creating the Calton into a Barony, but not of Regality.[3]

In 1819 Mile End was annexed to the Calton by an Act of Parliament, then in 1846 the Calton was itself annexed to Glasgow. There had been four Provosts during the time; Robert Struthers, a Calton brewer; Nathaniel Stevenson who held office for 21 years; and Robert Bartholemew and Robert Bankier were the others. The

[2] Whose are the statistics, and the quote, and where to be found? (is it Dr Russel of p6)

[3] 'of Regality', what's the difference?

Burgh Buildings stood at the corner of Struthers Street and Stevenson Street. The Provost's House, a substantial two storey building, was situated in James Street. Later it became a stable and it stood until 1930 when it was burned down. I was there the night it happened and will never forget the screams of the poor horses trapped in the blaze.

The demand for political reform was taking shape in 1793. Thomas Muir, Advocate of Huntershill and born in the High Street, was tried for sedition then transported to Botany Bay. The Calton was a village of weavers in the late eighteenth century and when the mill-owners introduced a massive wage-cut which, in some cases, meant pay was halved, there were strikes and demonstrations. On the order of Provost Liddell troops were called out under the command of a Colonel Kellet. The Riot Act was read and the soldiers opened fire, killing six weavers and seriously wounding twenty; dozens of others were injured.

No history of the Calton could ever be written without reference to this.[4] It was one of the most vile acts against workers in a long history of foul deeds. The weavers' only crime was to defend themselves against the wage-cuts carried out by the mill-owners. In 1787 they marched down Barrack Street in an orderly procession to demonstrate their opposition, only to be met by the military. Three of the dead were buried in the old Calton cemetry in Abercromby Street.

Provost Liddell was a prominent merchant of the day and his uncle was John Glassford of Douglaston, probably the most famous merchant in the city. After Colonel Kellet's brave act of shooting into a crowd of unarmed workers Provost Liddell deemed it appropriate to give him the Freedom of the City of Glasgow, and he granted all the troops a toddy and a free pair of boots and stockings.

The Calton Weavers have become legends in the trade union movement for laying down their lives for a basic human right. Memorial stones were erected in the old Calton cemetry.[5] They have been renovated and renewed down through the years by the

[4] See the Calton Weavers' Memorial 1787: the first recorded industrial strike in the history of Glasgow [pamphlet published by Glasgow District Trades Council, 1950s?]

[5] In 1991 another commemoration took place in the old Calton Cemetry at Abercrombie Street, led by Hugh Savage on behalf of the Friends of the People's Palace who had been instrumental in raising the funds for a commemorative stone.

Glasgow Trades Council and the *Friends of the People's Palace*. This brave movement of weavers and other workers later on led to one weaver by the name of Andrew McKinlay being arrested in 1817 and charged with treason. His trial in Edinburgh came to an abrupt end when it was seen to be a conspiracy led by spies of the state.[6] The Rising of 1820 was a real threat to the state authorities and the weavers played a central part in that.[7]

The biggest social problem in Glasgow has been bad housing. For a period of more than a hundred years successive local councils and governments not only failed to solve it, they made no attempt to tackle it. The only politician of any stature was John Wheatley, MP for Shettleston.[8] He succeeded in getting basic housing

[6] Lord Cockburn refers to 'the case of McKinlay' in *Trials for Sedition in Scotland*, Vol. 1 p244 (Douglas, Edinburgh 1888 in two volumes; reprinted as one by Augustus M. Kelley, 1970).

[7] During the Scottish Insurrection, the Strathaven weavers and other radicals were much to the fore, including 63 year old James Wilson who was executed by the authorities at Glasgow Green in 1820. The other two weavers were executed at Stirling; Andrew Hardie from the Townhead area of Glasgow and John Baird from Condorret. See the seminal *The Scottish Insurrection of 1820*, by Peter Berresford Ellis and Seamus Mac a'Ghobbainn [Pluto Press 1971?]

[8] John Wheatley (1869-1930) was born in Co. Waterford, Ireland; his family moved to Scotland in the same year and he was brought up in Bargeddie. 'Maxton was an orator and nothing more; it was Wheatley who had actually built the ILP in Glasgow. . . None of the [Clyde Workers' Committee] shop stewards ever criticised him – he was the only man in the ILP who was never attacked by the revolutionary left – because he did a lot of work behind the scenes for them.' [McShane in *No Mean Fighter* p198].
But later others were critical of Wheatley, his support for Davie Kirkwood at the expense of the other six Clydeside shop stewards, following their deportation from Glasgow in 1916; his lack of support for John Maclean during the latter days of his imprisonment. Leon Trotsky was dismissive, condemning Wheatley alongside David Kirkwood and George Lansbury; that 'their radicalism is bounded by democracy and religion, and poisoned with a national conceit that completely subjects them to the British bourgeoisie.' see Raymond Ross *Trotsky Among the Scots*, published in *Cenrastus* 28 in which he explores Leon Trotsky's connections with Scotland.

legislation through the House of Commons which allowed local authorities to address the problem.

At one time if you walked from Glasgow Cross along the southside of the Gallowgate beyond Moir Street you would have come to several large openings in the grey sandstone tenements. These were called 'pens'. At the back of them you would have seen as many as four closes leading to three landings, with six or four doors on each. In one particular pen – locals called it the 'Pudding Pen' – at least a hundred people resided, including children and pensioners. It happened a lot. Tenements were built directly in front of the older buildings, they became known as 'back loans'.

Hundreds of them abounded in Brigton and Calton. Most of the ground floors were single-ends and the people had to burn light night and day because no daylight, let alone sunlight, ever came through any windows. Their backcourts were very small. In a whole number of cases the middens were pressed right up against the ground floor windows, so there were all kinds of vermin, the houses were rat-infested.

Despite the efforts of the tenants the insides of these hovels were horrific. Some of the single-ends hardly measured 8 ft by 4 ft. They had set-in beds which in some cases slept two adults and four children. Some set-in beds had a door that could be shut. In 1818 typhus fever raged unchecked for a year and raised the death-rate for the city 42% higher than the average for the previous five years. Cholera first appeared in Glasgow in 1832. The virulence of the disease terrified people. In the Albion Street cholera hospital 79% of all victims died and three thousand people died between February and November. In the whole of the city south of the river there was only one doctor, and none at all in either Brigton or the Calton. In his report on the children whose deaths were so numerous, Dr. J. B. Russell, Glasgow's Medical Officer of Health at that time, stated:

Their little bodies were laid on a table or a dresser so as to be somewhat out of the way of their brothers and sisters who play and sleep and eat in their ghastly company. From beginning to rapid-ending the lives of these children are short. One in every five of those who are born there never see the end of their first year.[9]

The most important pastime for a large section of the working class was social drinking in public houses. This was as true in Brigton or Calton as it was elsewhere. According to G. B. Wilson (quoted by T.C. Smout in his *A Century of the Scottish People 1830–1950)* the average consumption of spirits between 1830 and 1839 was 2.55 proof gallons per head of population per year. Considering the terrible housing conditions – the worst in Europe – it is not too surprising that drink might have been seen as an escape.

It is also true that Brigton and the Calton had the largest number of public houses in Glasgow so the people would not have had to travel far for a drink. In most streets and particularly the main roads there was said to be a pub at every lamp-post. There certainly was one at nearly every corner. My father told me that between Glasgow Cross and Parkhead Cross there were at least one hundred and fifteen. There were five pubs in my own street alone which was only about 900 yards long, and less than 20 yards away London Road had another ten. And of course it was never difficult to find a drink in any of the tens of dozens of shebeens in the district.

It may seem a contradiction to some but the growth of the Chartist movement in the Glasgow of 1838 also saw a growth in awareness of the evils of alcohol. On Monday 21st May there was a Chartist demonstration in Glasgow Green that drew a crowd of 200,000. Seventy trades unions marched in that procession. All public works were stopped. One newspaper sympathetic to the Chartists said that if Parliament refused to hearken to the call of the unenfranchised then the people would 'abstain from all liquor and tobacco and thus cripple Government revenue'.[10]

[9] Where is Dr Russell's quote to be found? and where for further information?

[10] There were two journals based in Glasgow around this period, the *Scottish Patriot* and the *Scottish Chartist Circular* but Hugh Savage may be referring to the earlier, *The True Scotsman*, which was Edinburgh-based. In his *History of the Chartist Movement 1837–1854* (facsimile edition by Merlin Press,1969) R C. Gammage tells us that Edinburgh the seat of learning and refinement was determined not to lag behind in so important a matter as that of the Press. There was not a democratic paper in Scotland and it supplied the deficiency. A journal marked by respectable talent and of imposing appearance, was started under the editorial management of Mr. John Fraser, an inhabitant of that city; it bore the title of *The True Scotsman*. It devoted itself more particularly to a record of the movements of the Scottish Democracy. With respect to the questions of moral and physical force, it was the exact counterpart of the *London Despatch*.

Alongside this agitation grew a strong temperance movement.[11] Temperance hotels began and the Chartist leader Robert Cranston began the temperance tea-rooms which lasted over a hundred years. Most of the religions played a part, except the Roman Catholic Church which remained aloof. There were individual exceptions. One Catholic priest, Father Theobald Matthews,[12] was a passionate supporter of the temperance cause and in 1842 he addressed 30,000 people at Glasgow Green. While the non-catholic churches led the temperance movement in Scotland the skilled craftsmen and their trades unions played a large part from among the working class.

There were Chartist shops and Chartist churches and hundreds of demonstrations and working class people were hearing alternative voices. One of the greatest was Bronterre O'Brien who spoke to an assembly of 10,000 at Monkton Moor in Fifeshire where he said:

> If God sent the rich people into the world with combs in their head like fighting cocks, if he sent the poor people into the world with humps on their backs like ???[13]

[11] In 1829 Glasgow saw 'the first Temperance Society in Britain, founded in Maryhill by John Dunlop, an unpopular absentee landlord and Mary Hill's grandson.' (see Guthrie Hutton's Introduction to his *Old Maryhill*, published by Richard Stenlake, 1994)

[12] Father Theobald Matthews, info?

[13] I can't find the rest of this quote. James Bronterre O'Brien (1805), editor of the radical journal *The Operative*; see Gammage for some good information, in particular Chapter IV(p19): 'a man of great and singular talents. He had for many years been before the public. . . and had contributed a larger share in moulding the minds of the British Democrats than any other public writer (p77) . . . he detained his audiences longer than any other public speaker. Three hours was about the usual time he occupied a meeting; but he sometimes spoke for four, and even five, hours. . . ' He also spoke on Glasgow Green, once to an extraordinary assembly of around 130,000. At nearly every sentence [he] drew forth a burst of laughter or cheering, or both. . . [then advised the audience that] he would not give a fig for all their clamouring and clapping of hands, unless [they] were prepared to do something effective. . . ' (p118)

THAT YOUR family and your environment are fundamental to your development into manhood and your socialisation goes without saying. I was born after the first World War into a family of two girls and two boys. My father was a railway worker employed by Wordie Ltd., a subsidiary of the LMS, the London Midland & Scottish Railways. He was a carter to begin with but later on he became a checker in the goods' yard at the old Buchanan Street Station. He was a staunch Roman Catholic, attending Sacred Heart chapel every Sunday. My mother had been a cotton weaver in a few mills in the east end of Glasgow. When I arrived she worked in Wilson's, alongside her sister Jean who died when I was quite young. My sister Peggy worked there too. The mill was around the corner from our house in 118 Bernard Street. It was owned by the Shaw family who acquired a great deal of fame through one of their sons, G. D. Wilson, one of the greatest rugby players seen in Scotland.

My paternal grandparents came from the north of Ireland in the 1850s, among the thousands that flocked to Scotland to escape from the collapse of the agrarian economy and the potato famine. But they seemed to prosper in Glasgow and had a small fish and chip shop in French Street, right in the heart of the cotton mills. Our family stayed in Solway Street in those days, just round the corner. This was before I was born. I never met them and have no recollection of them. I don't think they were tycoons as the only one of the two girls and three sons that made up their family who did not take up a manual job was my Uncle Hugh whom apparently I'm called after. My maternal grandparents' family came from the north of Scotland much earlier, fleeing from the Highland Clearances so the roots of my working class background were deeply entrenched.

My father was the eldest son, including my Uncle Hugh he had two brothers and two sisters. His other brother James lived in Canning Street (now London Road). They were not close but we did get visits from James's two sons, and he also had at least one daughter. She was engaged to be married to George Geddes Junior,

son of the famous Georgie Geddes who founded the Humane Society, responsible for rescuing people in difficulty both in the River Clyde and other waters in and around Glasgow.

The death of George Junior was one of the worst tragedies in Glasgow. Apparently a woman had tried to drown herself by jumping from the suspension bridge in the Glasgow Green. Young George managed to get a hold of her from the boat but she was quite a heavy woman and they were drifting near the wear gates. He jumped into the water to try to lift her in but she immediately grabbed hold of him round the neck and despite him being a champion swimmer she pulled him under. They were sucked towards the wear and both were drowned. Despite that old Georgie Geddes carried on with the rescue service well into his eighties.

My father kept in touch with his family from time to time and he usually took me along to their nice corporation house in Riddrie. I thought that anyone who had a garden lived in a palace as the nearest grass we saw was the Glasgow Green half a mile away. My mother naver came as she never went anywhere with my father, although she did feel that my Auntie Agnes was a bit of a snob. My dad's eldest sister Mary stayed in the house and she was a very nice person. She was a mistress [supervisor] in Strang's mill in Greenhead Street and was a sweet lady. She was a regular visitor at our house in Bernard Street and she never missed giving us all a penny. I faintly remember visiting my Uncle Hugh's house in Riddrie and the frosty atmosphere there, you were hardly allowed to leave your chair and I do not recall ever being spoken to by either aunt and my uncle or any of his family. Although I was named after him and all our family went to Sacred Heart school in Bridgeton where he was a teacher – my sisters Peggy and Elizabeth were in his class – he never acknowledged our presence. There was always an air of superiority about him. Many years later when my father died, the very night his body was being taken to the Chapel, Uncle Hugh came to our close but he waited at the bottom and didn't come up to the house. He never did enter our house. Yet if the older members of his family had not taken ordinary jobs to supplement the family income my grandparents could not have afforded the fees to put him through University.

However I most certainly remember my Granny Scott, my mother's mum who lived further along Bernard Street. She had been widowed very young. My grandfather was called Walter Scott, he became the chief superintendent at the Philadelphia gas works in America. Their son, my uncle Andrew, was only a baby when Walter was killed outright by an explosion. As far as I know my gran had been planning to go out and join my grandfather in the USA. It must have been a terrible shock for her, a young woman widowed with three children. But she did not sit back feeling sorry for herself. There is no doubt she received generous compensation because in no time she opened up three or four 'oil and colour' shops in the Calton and Mile End.

This type of shop was a necessity in Glasgow in those days, selling candles, gas-mantles, paraffin and firelighters. Most of the tenements were gas-lit, perhaps with the occasional paraffin lamp. My grannie prospered for many years but when I came along she had remarried and all the shops were gone.

My step-grandfather was called McDairmid. He had been the coachman to the Caldwells, the family who owned the famous Scotia leatherworks in Boden Street, Bridgeton. Up till recently if you were going down Dunn Street you could see the large water steel-tank still standing with the name Scotia emblazoned on it. According to my mother when Granda McDairmid was dressed in his livery and driving the Caldwell coach with its pair of grey horses he was a handsome sight. He was a very tall man and must have cut a dashing figure. Then of course it is obvious that my grandmother, being a young, quite well-off widow, must have been regarded as a very good catch. However when I remember Granda McDairmid he was retired and working as the watchman in the Scotia works. I used to go along with him to keep the boilers going and feed the Airdale watchdog that I played with. I had the time of my life wandering through the empty works and offices followed by the large dog.

Grannie Scott was one of the most capable and able woman I ever met. Even although I was quite young I knew she feared no one, despite her size. Not that she was physical in any way but her commanding voice and capable manner made people twice her size shrivel. She had developed a cancer on her forehead and she had to travel by tramcar to the Royal Infirmary twice a week to have it burned, without any pain-killers. My mother used to come home crying yet my grannie never said a word. She kept an immaculate house with two horse-hair rocking chairs that I used to

play on although because of my short trousers my bare legs got jagged whenever I slid on or off them.

The real attraction, as I got older, was using her stairhead toilet. This was my pride and joy, my reading room. There were only two houses on her landing and only three people used it so it was scrupulously clean and you had all the time in the world to do your business, which for me meant being able to read.

I used to buy my favourite comics and make a beeline for my granny's carsy and if it was dark I borrowed a wee candle and a match. I read in peace and solitude, until one night I had retired there with my Rover comic, the candle and a box of matches, and I heard footsteps halt outside. I was settled back enjoying the exploits of Morgan the Mighty. I wondered what to do. I was ready to chap the door and say there was somebody using it when whoever it was seemed to lean against it. I immediately doused the candle then horror stricken I heard two voices. It was the lassie upstairs with her boyfriend. I waited in silence, afraid to breathe or even pull up my trousers. After a few minutes I knew I could not declare my presence, it was going to be a serious winching session. I looked around to see if I could squeeze out the wee window but as it was one stair up it would have been very difficult and probably quite dangerous so I waited in silence. Then my granny came to the rescue, she opened her door and shouted 'Hughie! hurry up out of that lavvy!' And to my relief I heard the lassie saying a hurried goodnight and running up the stairs. I was out that toilet and diving into my grannie's house faster than the favourite at Shawfield[14] could get out its trap. After that, whenever I passed that lassie, I always kept looking away.

My grannie's cancer got worse and she eventually died. I cannot recall a great deal about her actual death but I can remember her funeral. She was buried in Sandymount cemetery and I went regularly with my mother on a Sunday to put flowers on her grave. I also know that she had made my mother promise to take in Peggy Park, the second daughter of my Auntie Jean who before she died worked in Wilson's cotton mill alongside my mother. After she died her husband emigrated to Canada and her daughter Peggy Park had stayed with Granny Scott. So despite the terrible pain and agony my granny was suffering she made certain that when she herself died my cousin Peggy Park was still sure of a home.

[14] see p24 Shawfield Greyhound Stadium which at that time and up until the 1980s was home to Clyde FC. Greyhounds continue to race there four nights per week.

Our house at 118 Bernard Street became quite crowded with three boys and now three girls. Unfortunately my mother was dealt a terrible blow, my sister Lizzie died when she was only 13. My mother never recovered from this. Despite the fact it was diagnosed as meningitis my mother always felt it came because Lizzie had got a fright from the man next door that she never got over. I was just a wee boy and cannot remember much about that period. But despite the cramped house it was a happy house most of the time, with plenty of people coming and going. The week-ends were very cheery. On Saturdays my mother's brother, my Uncle Andrew, came down from Germiston. He walked all the way there and back again. While we were not wealthy there was always plenty of good homemade soup, with stew or mince and tatties or stovies. My uncle Andrew had not worked for years so my mother used to give him a shilling for a wee punt with the bookie that lifted the lines in our close. He really was a good laugh. He used to bet 'thruppny' doubles and trebles. We always said if his line came up the bookie would have to do a runner as he would not have enough cash to pay out. My Uncle Andrew was really a poor soul but he was so nice and warm he lit up the entire household.

Then of course we had always a great night on Sunday. When the tea was finished there was a domino school with all of us in the game, including a distant relation of my mother's, Davie Fairley. We called him Uncle Davie. He was a top-class cabinet maker, an artist. He made beautiful, hand-carved mahogany tea-trays and any kind of furniture. He was a modest and quiet man and he loved his game of dominoes every Sunday night. Although the stakes were only coppers he had a good laugh when he put down his last domino to win the pot and he always shouted 'domino for Dovid'.

We did not have a wireless in those days. We made our own entertainment. Our house was only a room and kitchen with an outside toilet and there were seven of us living in the place. Even so there were hundreds of people worse off than us, living in much more overcrowded conditions. When you are young it does not seem to matter though, I never felt disadvantaged. It was a very happy home. Before James, my older brother, got married there were four

wage earners in the family. This made us better off financially than most of our neighbours. Of course my father's pay was only £1/12/0 per week and my mother's was 15/-, my sister Peggy earned only 10/- and James got 12/-, so it was not exactly a fortune.

There were two busy cooperative societies, the Glasgow Eastern and the London Road.[15] They played a very important role in the social fabric of those days. It is important to stress the role the Cooperatives played in things like the organisation of day-trips to the coast for children. They always had choirs for males and females and these choirs were usually available for weddings and socials. When the May-Day parades came around you could be assured that the largest and most colourful section would be the Cooperative Society and they would have dozens of decorated lorries. Children would be seated inside and they would be drawn by magnificent Clydesdale horses that were owned by every Cooperative Society; and leading many of the contingents would be their massed bands.

Another aspect of the Cooperatives was the dividend they paid on your purchases. As well as providing everything from dairy produce to clothes and furniture the dividend could be large enough to buy school clothing. It was paid on a quarterly basis and if you left it lying it came in handy for your Christmas and the New Year, or even as a help towards your holidays if you could afford them. We were quite fortunate in that regard as my father worked in the railways at Buchanan Street goods' station. He could get passes for his family every year. For over thirteen years we went to the granite city of Aberdeen and the co-op dividend made a major contribution to our expenses. It also helped to purchase clothes out of what they called the drapery department.

But none of any of that would have been possible if it had not been for my mother. We could never have managed without her. As well as bringing up a family of seven, including my cousin Peggy Park, my mother worked at the mill from 8 o'clock in the morning till nearly 6 o'clock at night. On Saturdays she finished at 12 noon and went straight to the steamie[16] at Ruby Street. She booked for two hours and we pulled all the washing in a large wicker basket on

[15] In their *All for the Cause: Willie Nairn 1856-1902* Hugh and Les Forster give information on Nairn's involvment in the Co-operative movement.

[16] the public washhouse.

wheels down the road, and then when her turn was up we pulled the clean clothes back to Bernard Street where they were hung out in the backcourt, weather permitting. After that they would be taken up to the house for ironing.

My mother was also a good baker and could make shortbread and a clootie dumpling for a few pennies. She made large pots of broth with a nat or hambone from the butcher plus a penny's worth of vegetables. For tenpence she could make stovies and tatties for ten people. We used to go to what was called the 'shan shop'.[17] This was opened by McFarlane Lang the bakers to sell off their mishapen loafs, buns and cakes – the ones that did not come up to standard – at reduced prices. We carried them home in a big pillow case.

None of the boys ever wore a pair of trousers bought out a shop. My mother used to buy good-sized remnants from a small Jewish tailor in Saltmarket who gave her quality material cheap. The only snag was the Singer sewing machine she had to use. She could not manage the intricate sewing on the front of the short trousers and created what she called a 'bobbie-patch', so a wee boy like myself could answer the call of nature.

My father was a very dour man. I can never recall having a conversation with him. He never read anything of substance, but then he was no different from most people in his time, your only pastimes were the pub and a wee bit gambling maybe on the horses. His wages in those days were £1-12-0 a week when he worked with the LMS railways so there was not much to go around. Then again you could get a pint of beer for a penny and a quarter gill of whisky for thruppence, and twenty woodbine cigarettes for thruppence, so I suppose everything is relative.

In most things I feel my father had an inferiority complex but he was not afraid of any of the so-called hard-men in the district. I remember my mother telling me of an incident between him and a man called Boyle when we were all very young. There was a Mrs Murdoch who lived in the wee single-end in the close. One day she came to our door which was on the third floor and battered on it quite loud and she was shouting 'Hurry up Mrs Savage, wee Boyle is going roon the Booly[18] to fight your man and he'll get murdered.'

[17] shan or shang: a Scots word for food, especially a bite between meals; still current in Glasgow and district.

[18] The area known as 'The Booly' was in Walkinshaw Street, Bridgeton

My mother opened the door and said, 'If my man is daft enough to fight let him get murdered, that's his problem' and she shut the door. Old Mrs Murdoch who was fond of a drink leaned against the wall and shouted 'Whit kind of wummin are you who's no worried about yer man.'

Apparently what happened was down in Flynn's pub wee Boyle, who had a bit of a reputation as a fighting man, demanded that my faither buy him a drink. My faither told him to get lost or words to that effect, so the challenge was issued, and it was accepted. The whole pub more or less emptied and made their way to the Booly for the square-go.[19] My father finished his pint then followed them. Wee Boyle led the crowd. As he passed a group of men standing at the corner of Dunn Street and Bernard Street he saw a well-known fighting man called Willie Lamont and he said to him 'Are you coming roon the Booly to see me giving Savage a doing?' Willie Lamont looked at him and said 'Ah widny bet on it'.

When they reached the Booly wee Boyle stripped to the waist and started sparring around, practising. My faither, who had arrived later, finished his fag and stepped into the centre of the man-made ring. As Boyle approached him he pulled the skip of his bonnet to the back of his head then grabbed Boyle's arm and butted him right on the nose with his forehead. He continued to do that with wee Boyle's nose spurting blood and the crowd booing, until the man slumped to the ground. My faither made an attempt to give him a hand up but Boyle's supporters pushed him away shouting 'Savage by name and Savage by nature'. Apparently when my faither came home he washed his hands, took his tea and went to bed without saying a word. But he never spoke about anything that happened outside the home.

It seemed like our house was always packed with people. My mother must have been the Mother Teresa of those days as she never turned anybody away. She took pity on one of my father's workmates who worked as a carter with the same firm of railway contractors. The man had no family in Glasgow and he had lost his digs, so my mother fitted him in.

Then of course when her step-sister had to run out in the middle of the night from her husband, she had to take her in as well. This

[19] 'square go' is Glaswegian for a 'fair fight', ie. no weapons, fists only, preferably no kicking, and no head-butting.

was my Auntie Nellie, escaping a beating when her man came home drunk. She was one of the first lady conductors on the Glasgow trams and had been a skilled shoemaker in Galleries' factory in Dalmarnock Road. She was a tall lady and very good-looking when she was young. She also had a nice soprano voice. She could have had her choice of young men. One of the boys that she went with was called Kenny Campbell. As far as I know he played for Dundee United and was capped for Scotland. However, Auntie Nellie had married a plumber called Walker and a sore face was a regular occurrence when he came home drunk at the weekends. My mother used to tell her she did not have to take it because she had no family to hold her back.

But Auntie Nellie was not alone. When I was a baby my mother had the same problem when my own father came home drunk. When he was out drinking on a Saturday night she had to take all us kids downstairs to a nice woman called Mrs Elborn. We all waited there until after the pub doors closed and he had come home and went to bed. One time he found out where we were taking refuge and he came up the stairs and burst open her door and confronted all of us. I was in my mother's arms. As he made to grab her my brother James who was only sixteen stepped forward. James was an apprentice joiner and had taken up a wee bit boxing, he was very well-built. He said to my father, 'No, I've watched you hitting my mother for years and you've hit her for the last time.' My father moved to hit him but James hit him first and he fell to the floor. James pulled him outside and sat him down on the stairs. Most of the family went back up to the house. But Mrs Elborn made my mother a cup of tea and when the girls came to take their mother up the stairs they said their dad was still sitting on the stairs crying 'My boy hit me.' But it is a fact that that was the last time my dad ever raised his hand to my mother.

general industrial pic
p194 Ships for a Nation

Clydebank showing the huge Singer factory after it moved from Brigton. This picture from the deck of a ship in John Brown's yard shows industry all around

Employment, Unemployment; Living Conditions

MOST WORKERS were within walking distance of a job in Brigton. Sir William Arrol's steel and bridge building-works was right in Bernard Street and there was the other factories like I mentioned earlier on, plus several cotton-mills including Wilson's where my mother was a weaver along with my sister Peggy. I knew the inside of Wilson's very well as I had my dinner in it every day. My mother had it laid out for us alongside her loom. After eating it there I had to rush back to school. Of course there were many famous mills in the vicinity, including Anderson's shirt-mill which became Hollins, manufacturers of the famous and expensive Vyella shirt.

The first motor car in Scotland, 'the Argyle', was built in Brigton at a factory located at the corner of Baltic Street and John Street. Later on the same site Singers began their first sewing-machine factory before moving onto Clydebank.[20] There was also the Acme wringer-works in Fielden Street on the north side of London Road. Their products were a boon to those women who could afford to buy one. A large number of backcourts had uncovered middens and in the summertime, because of the lochs of human excrement, many tenants could not even get into the backcourts. This meant the women could not hang their washing out to dry. The Acme wringer meant their clothes could be wrung out at the sink and would be dry enough to hang up in the pulley inside the kitchen.

Further along London Road in Fordneuk Street was Claude Alexander the tailor. It was some name for Brigton but he had many shops throughout Glasgow. Going towards Celtic Park and two streets before Kerrydale Street there was McPhee's sawmills.

[20] There was a very significant strike at the Singer's sewing machine factory in Clydebank For detailed information see *The Singer Strike Clydebank, 1911*, compiled by the Glasgow Labour History Workshop and published by Clydebank District Library in 1989; Hugh Savage and Les Forster were among the Workshop contributors. The strikers at Clydebank included Jane Rae, Arthur McManus, Neil Maclean and Tom Bell but 'the spark which ignited [the strike] was the stand taken by the women polishers'.

Across the London Road on the southside you had Connell's ginger-works.[21] In the next street you had one of the largest haulage contractors in the business, Gavin Wilkie's. They hauled all the tubes from Stewart & Loyds in Rutherglen to all the shipyards, and to the other tube works in Tollcross and as far as Coatbridge, all horse-drawn. It was some sight to see, four big Clydesdales in pairs, pulling tons of tubes miles in a day all over the west of Scotland. As wee boys we used to sit outside the stables in Boden Street waiting for the horses to come back in the evening.

There is no doubt that Brigton was one of the city's key industrial districts. Yet at nearly every street corner where I stayed there were dozens of unemployed men and boys. Hardly one of them had a suit on his back; they wore odd jackets and trousers. In most cases they wore hand-me-downs, clothes passed from one person to another. There were no dry-cleaners in those days, and no money to use them if there had been.

Unemployment was particularly bad among the young men over twenty. Many had to leave their homes due to the imposition of the means-test. The local parish officers calculated the total income from the parish and if it was over a certain figure, just like today, then any single person's benefit would be stopped, and that person would have to leave home. While hundreds went abroad, many more had to join work-schemes. Thousands could be seen hanging about the street corners in Glasgow. You could tell them because they were sorely clad. Many of them did not even own a suit, and if they did it was in the pawnshop. Their trousers and jackets were mostly torn or stained.

I remember one of the above young men, he had been idle for over two years and then got a job in Martin's leather works which was situated at the end of our street. Within a few weeks he had saved enough money to purchase a complete new suit. Unfortunately his pal, big Andy, was knocked-back for a job. In better times they had exchanged suits as they were more or less the same build. The purpose of this caper was to creat the impression that they had an extensive wardrobe or, as they said in those days, to show they were 'well geared-up'. During this period a few of the Glasgow dance-halls, like the Locarno, ran matinee sessions and it

[21] In Glasgow lemonade and other aerated waters occasionally are referred to as 'ginger'.

only cost 3d or 4d to get in. So big Andy got into the habit of going up to his pal's house and taking a loan of the suit to go to the Locarno and returning it before his pal came home from work.

But here I have to admit I cannot remember the outcome of that story, but I do know that long-term unemployment is degrading and should play no part in a civilised society. It is remarkable, when you look back, that in a district teeming with works and factories, at every street corner from morning till night groups of unemployed men of all ages spent their time hanging about.

Most of these world-famous firms paid starvation wages and woe betide any of their workers who happened to mention unions. Another feature of the employment policy of firms such as Templeton's, Sir William Arrol's and others was the strict veto on Catholics. This was never admitted and the bosses concealed it by asking school-leavers which school they attended. In the case of adults they checked their record and religion by contacting their previous employers. The number of firms that did not employ a religious-bar was so small that just by naming his previous place of work the applicant provided that necessary information.

I wonder how the owners of Strang's cotton-mills in Greenhead Street would have reacted if they had known that the well-spoken woman who spent some time with the weavers, taking sketches of them at their looms, was Sylvia Pankhurst[22] and that the senior tenor in their mill was the brother of the famous – or infamous – suffragette, depending on your point of view.

[22] Sylvia Pankhurst [1882-1960]; 'When other children were demanding a pretty doll or a lollipop. . . the cry of the Pankhurst children was "Take me to a meeting!" [Roger Fulford]. A crucial figure in radical history whose grandfather was a cotton spinner in Salford and her father a member of the ILP from the earliest years. Her mother Emily was a leading Suffragette who once spoke in Clydebank at a meeting chaired by the redoubtable Jane Rae, ex-member of the Singer workforce, sacked following the great strike of 1911. Sylvia Pankhurst was among the British delegates in Moscow for the Second Congress of the Communist International, 'representing the Communist Party [British Section of the Third International]. She attended with 'her friend Helen Crawfurd.' [see *Scottish Labour Leaders 1918–1939*]. John T. Caldwell writes that the anti-parliamentary group. . . the Workers' Socialist Federation, centred around Sylvia

In school you were shown maps of the world coloured in red sections indicating the countries that formed the Empire. You were never told that the natives of these lands had been dispossessed and then enslaved by their captors, the British ruling class. This was only one of thousands of facts and truths that you were not told as you made your progress through school. In the 1930s Glasgow was still the second city of the British Empire and the sixth city of Europe but to wee boys playing about the streets it was just places like Brigton with street after street of smoke-grimed grey tenements, with the occasional red sandstone one where we thought the toffs lived. These grey tenement buildings consisted of three stories with three houses on each landing and with an earthenware w.c. on the half-landing, providing one toilet for all the occupants of the three houses in that particular landing. In a tenement close like the one our family stayed in at 118 Bernard Street probably twenty two people including children used that one bog. In the twenty odd years I lived there the w.c. was never renewed and nor was it ever painted. Neither was the close.

The above example was not the worst. There were some tenements in Brigton where as many as thirty or forty folk were all using the same so-called toilet-facilities, up closes in Baltic Street and Nuneaton Street for instance, and in some of the back-loans of London Road where there were six doors on each landing, and that meant six families.

Bernard Street ran parallel with London Road and had five public houses with another ten nearby. A pub consisted of a public bar and a 'family department' that catered for anyone wishing a carry-out of liquor. In those days the publicans did not cater for women. Outside the ground floor windows and at the mouth of

Pankhurst. The Communist League had suggested a merger with the Federation, but Sylvia had replied that the two organisations were too similar for that to be necessary. The Federation then, without waiting for anyone else, declared itself to be the British Communist Party, and assumed affiliation to the International by adding in brackets (British Section of the International – BSTI). Lenin was not pleased. He considered that the Communist Parties of the world must be recognised by the International, and approved by himself. Besides, he did not approve of anti-parliamentarianism. He advised Sylvia to get in touch with other Groups and arrange a Unity Conference.

most of the closes groups of women would congregate. None of them wore coats, they all wore shawls of various colours and sizes. In most cases they were carrying weans. You could look along the whole of Bernard Street and never see a pram. The women carried their children everywhere in a shawl. They just had to get out of the houses. No wireless, no washing-up facilities except the kitchen sink, no furniture other than several beds, a coal bunker and a large kitchen table where the whole family dined. There was hardly a place to sit and being lit by gas the atmosphere was always very stuffy.

The women went on standing at the close and the corner till well after 10 pm. I remember a pal of mine, when we were talking about this, he told me a story about a crowd of women that used to stand outside a close in Arcadia Street. One of them had been married very young and still carried her wee boy in a shawl, right up till he was over four years of age. It so happened the young mother had a full vocabulary of the more colourful language. One evening she was standing at the close and her wee boy got tired and fell asleep, and he slumped ever deeper into the shawl. She kept adjusting it by opening it and changing the wean's position till eventually he woke up and shouted 'Shut the fucking shawl, there's a draught!'

You can sometimes forget that in the midst of all the deprivation and poverty not only had people a sense of humour and humanity, they had a real community. There were no social services or social workers as such, you had a health visitor or green-lady, as she was called. Most babies were born at home. The death-rate was horrific but it would have been much higher if it had not been for the mid-wives who delivered a large number of these children. One such person who has never received a mention in all the records of Brigton as far as I know was Nurse Mulholland. She lived all her life in Greenhead Street facing the Glasgow Green and she must have delivered thousands of babies.

In the summer particularly it was quite a regular occurrence to have large puddles of waste water flooding the back courts, usually with human excrement floating on the surface. It got so bad that tenants could not get access to the middens to deposit their ashes and rubbish. And the women could not walk out to the backcourts to hang up the family washings, especially if it happened at

weekends when a plumber was not available. Most women were like our neighbour Mrs Kerr, a clean wee soul and a very kind lady, but always running back and forward to the steamie.

The most serious consequence of the above was disease, if the drain remained choked these great big puddles were an attraction for the weans, even although they were afloat with horrible sewage waste. The backcourt was the only real place they could play so who could be surprised when an outbreak of a contagious disease like dysentry did take place. If these children stood on a piece of glass when wading with their bare feet you could be sure that the cut would fester if not immediately sterilised. It is to the credit of the ordinary people of places like Brigton that if Iodine Tincture or Boracic Lint was not available then something would still be done, and the good old carbolic soap with a bread poultice was used as the final standby.

The rents of our houses went to a house factor called R. Metcalf who had at least three offices in the district where you paid in at least once a month. I learned many years later that the actual owners of these tenements lived abroad, some as far away as the Argentine. The factors who looked after the houses for them had allowed the backcourt washhouses to fall into such a state of disrepair that either they fell down or had to be demolished.

When they did fall down they could severely injure children because the backcourt was their playground. The hundreds of delapidated old buildings that still stood in the backcourts, the remains of long-gone houses, workshops and derelict wash-houses provided active boys like me with good dykes to play on. We did what we called 'the jumps', jumping or leaping from one dyke to another. We graduated from wee jumps of maybe three or four feet to some as long as six, seven or even eight feet. It could be dangerous as it was a long fall to the ground. The dykes stood as high as eight feet and the landing would be onto tarmac or concrete or dirt and old rubble but it was usually a kind of contest and most boys took the risk.

I can recall on one occasion a wee fair-haired boy getting crushed to death when the rotten old brickwork built with lime collapsed and the solid concrete roof of the washhouse fell in on him. He came from Dunn Street, from a nice family, and they never got over their unnecessary loss.

THE CHURCH AND RECREATION; WORKERS' CASINOS, STREET ENTERTAINMENT

THERE WERE two churches in the street and both were very well known, one of them was St Francis in the East. It provided a great deal of help to the unemployed by providing some basic training on things like assembling radios for the men, and sewing and cooking classes for the women. My mother became a member of their sodality classes. The place was known as the Pal's club and I think was quite similar to what the late Rev. George McLeod[23] carried out in Govan.

In most working-class districts were the soirees run by some of the evangelical churches. These consisted of a religious service, the singing of hymns, a bag of cakes and cups of tea, and then a sermon was usually conducted by a well-known evangelist. The famous Seth Sykes[24] and his wife regularly came. They went all over the country, and abroad, singing and preaching. When they appeared in the Bethany Hall in Bernard Street the main hall, which held nearly a thousand people, was full to capacity.

When the tea-meetings ended at about 9 pm. there was an army of small boys standing outside the main entrance. They would be asking the congregation, mainly women, if they 'had any bags?' The women all received a bag each when they went into the meetings, with at least four or five cakes and most of them only managed to eat one or two. In many cases they took pity on the children, most of them poorly clad, and gave them their bags. I was always partial to cakes myself and I joined the chorus and shouted 'Have ye any bags missus?' till one night my mother saw me and that was the end of my begging.

It was also a weekly event for twenty or more of the regular congregation of churches and mission halls to march from their

[23] The Very Rev. George Fielden MacLeod; Scottish Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh and then in Govan Glasgow; founder of the Iona Community and eventually Moderator of the General Assembly. He was regarded as 'extreme left-wing' by colleagues and other Christians and had an ecumenical approach which outraged many, especially when he wanted to 'introduce bishops into the kirk.' see his *Only One Way Left*.

[24] Info on Seb Sykes?

premises to the nearest main road junction. The Bethany Hall people marched to the corner of Dunn Street and London Road, singing hymns and accompanied by musical instruments like a concertina or an accordion. When they reached the corner they carried out a prayer meeting with several speakers – men and women – telling people who were standing or passing by how they had found the glory of God. They sang their hymns and appealed for people to come forward and join their church, then they put round a small velvet bag asking for a financial contribution.

This was repeated throughout Brigton and the whole of Glasgow by hundreds of religious missions and evangelical groups. There were larger organisations like the Salvation Army who had a twenty-piece brass band performing at Brigton Cross every Sunday night. Sometimes they went all over the east end playing and collecting. There was another uniformed group from Moncur Street in the Calton who had a brass band and did the same as the Salvation Army, playing throughout the district. They also had a medical centre in their premises where they administered medical help.

So in different ways Brigton, despite the grinding poverty, had a vibrant community. But the main form of entertainment was the pictures. Talking-pictures had just been introduced and the very first one to come to Glasgow was *The Singing Fool* with Al Jolson as its star. It appeared in the Coliseum, Eglinton Street on the south side of the city. I was too young to remember but it caused a real sensation. As I got older cinemas had mushroomed all over Glasgow[25] and talking-pictures came to most of them. Many music halls changed to showing films. Some like the King's in James Street and the Olympia at Bridgeton Cross did both on the one programme, putting on a live variety-turn in between the two pictures.

I remember as a wee boy being in the King's and to the delight of the audience the one and only Victor McLaglan was introduced on the stage. There was uproar. On his way out after he went up the centre passage and as I was on the outside seat next to the passage I reached out and touched his beautiful camel-hair coat. He towered above everybody and must have been over 6' 4". He had a big grin over his face and I felt so good to know that for the first and probably the last time in my life I touched a real film star. I learned later that

[25] For further information see Bruce Peter's *100 Years of Glasgow's Amazing Cinemas*, Polygon, 1996.

when he left that night he was on his way to Shawfield Stadium to see the world championship fight between Benny Lynch and Peter Kane.[26]

The area was saturated with picture-houses. Along with the King's and the Olympia there was the Royal, the Arcadia, the Star, the Strathclyde, the Plaza and the Premier which some people called the 'Geggy'. And if you cared to travel a few hundred yards to Dennistoun there were four more there, or else to Parkhead where there were another three, and so on.

This onslaught killed variety in most districts stone-dead although theatres like the Princess in the Gorbals and the Scotia in Watson Street still carried on, along with the Metropole and the Pavilion and quite a few others. Although it must be said that the closing of the Glasgow Empire in the 1960s was really the beginning of the taking-over of the city centre by the property speculators, that end of things had nothing at all to do with the growth of the cinema.

In the thirties Brigton was really a hive of activity and two other aspects of social life, particularly for the men, were drinking and gambling. At least three street-bookies lifted betting lines in our street. Our close at 118 was used by a bookie called Tommy Hyndman. He was quite a nice kind of man and many an unfortunate was given a bung by him. Then again, as it was unlicensed in those days, very few expenses were entailed and most of the runners and watchers were unemployed men. The bookies used to pay out the winners in a house up the close, usually one near the ground floor that was made available to them from the tenants for a small fee.

The bookies always made sure that the close where they operated had several escape-routes because it was a fact of life that the police always endeavoured to grab the guy who was taking the betting slips and they used all kinds of tricks to try and trap them. One favourite disguise the polis had was to pretend they were a plumber coming to fix a burst pipe. They had the usual working clothes on with a bag of tools and a water key. If the polis got near the bookie's lifter then he was taken to the jail, at that time in Old Dalmarnock Road. The lifter's betting slips and cash were confiscated and he was charged and eventually fined.

[26] Any pointers for history of boxing in West of Scotland of that period? (The Benny Lynch Story)

Later on it became more sophisticated. I can remember a well-known bookie with a betting shop in Cowcaddens. He got prior warning from his friendly neighbourhood cop about a raid and so warned off his good punters. Then he got several dozen occupants from the model-lodging house in Milton Street to come along to his betting shop to wait for the raid. When the model-lodging house punters were being taken into the Black Maria the bookie gave them five shillings each and another five bob to pay their fine, and everybody was happy apparently.

Hundreds of street bookies operated in Glasgow. I can remember one who lifted betting-lines in a close facing my school in Pirn Street. To get away from the polis this bookie actually dreeped from a two-storey window, which was probably about twenty feet high. It always struck me as amazing that the bookies were all well known yet they managed to operate for years. They did get the occasional visit with a fine but they were back on the streets the next day as usual. So the legalising of it probably saved them a lot of bungs to the polis and the magistrates or whoever happened to be on the payroll.

There was another type of gambling that was rife in working-class districts, this was Pitch and Toss. These 'tossing-schools', as they were known, took place in isolated spots and the guys here also had several escape-routes in the event of a police-raid. It is said by known gamblers that Pitch and Toss was the most honest game of the lot, unless you could get away with a two-headed penny which was very unlikely. Most of the tossing schools were run by the local hard-men who also ensured that winners were not pestered or threatened. Apparently, as far as I heard, if a hard-man fancied his chances he could fight his way in to get into the running of a pitch.

I do not know if tossing schools exist today. I am sure they must. In the thirties there were three quite large ones operated in the east end of Glasgow. There was a big one on the banks of the Clyde at Cambuslang. It was run by the Tottens from Rutherglen as far as I understand. They also say that the ex-British middleweight champion Jake Kilrain done his toller at it, the toller was the man that saw things ran smoothly and prevented trouble. It was a huge school with several hundred men sometimes in attendance.

For those of you not aware of the rules, if the person tossed two pennies in the air for say £50, and the coins landed on the ground with the two heads facing up then your stake of £50 became £100. The second time you won it became £200 and the third time £400. After that you could walk away minus your original stake of £50 which went to the guys running the game. However, if you wished you could carry on tossing the coins. After that first three-timer was done you could stop when you wanted. There were also side-bets took place amongst the crowd that had nothing to do with the tollers. A bit of come-and-go over disputed decisions was allowed to punters. All in all most regular gamblers thought it was quite a fair game and went back time and time again.

The other big tossing-school was at the side of the Clyde just next to, or at the back of, Belvidere Hospital. It was run by the McGrechans. I think the head guy was called Hughie. When I eventually worked as a fitter in the Gas Board in the 1950s my helper was Tam Durie, a toller at the McGrechan tossing school. He had been a local hard-man but when he worked with me he was quite a nice guy. But he did open my eyes to what took place behind the scenes. For a start, when we were talking about tossing-schools we were talking about thousands of pounds. First of all the polis were sorted out. They knew when a raid was to take place and all the heavy gamblers were warned not to come on certain Sundays. When any gambler did win a few hundred pounds he was always offered protection to reach the main road, sometimes even to be taken home. While mugging and robbing was not so rife in those days good gamblers did not exactly grow on trees and then the fact that you had to make your way a few hundred yards through isolated lanes meant it was better to be safe than sorry.

Tossing-schools were the workers' casinos and with mass unemployment few people strayed from their local neighbourhoods where most of their social life took place. The tossing-school I was most familiar with took place on a derelict site which had once been a pottery. It was next to Barrowfield, home-ground to Bridgeton Waverley of the Central Football League. The local hard-men who ran it included the Webb brothers, Elie and David, whose mother lived three closes down from us in Bernard Street. A third brother played football for an English First Division side. The main hard-man of this tossing-school was Neilly McHugh who had been a boxer, either cruiser or heavyweight. I went regularly with my pal, who happened to be Neilly's young brother.

Big Neilly had an easy-going attitude and was never aggressive unless challenged. I remember a young tearaway stepping into the ring and Big Neilly saying to him 'Look son it's no worth getting a sore face for a few bob.' The young guy persisted then threw off his jacket, and without taking off his bunnet Big Neilly stepped forward and belted him on the chin. It was at least ten minutes before the young guy recovered. The big man laid a pound note in his hand and said 'Away you go home son.'

At the top of the old pottery site was an area known as Nelson's whippet ground. Here every Saturday, and most other days too, they raced whippets. It was the forerunner to the more sophisticated greyhound racing but it still took place after greyhound racing began at Glasgow's many dog-tracks. Unlike professional dog racing the handler lifted the whippet up at the start of the race and its owner went down to the bottom of the area and flapped a hankie. When the whippet was released it ran to its owner. Of course betting took place and big money could change hands. Whippet racing remains a popular pastime in some parts of the country, particularly in the old mining villages.

In the early 1930s Clyde Football Club of the Scottish Senior First Division started to race greyhound dogs at their Shawfield Stadium. They became the fourth racing track in Glasgow to operate under license of the Greyhound Racing Association and its rules. The others were the Albion, Carntyne and the White City. Also there were unlicensed dog-tracks like Ashfield, Clydebank, Mount Vernon and others. These unlicensed tracks were called flapping-gaffs, as far as I know because of the 'flapping hankies', the same start used by the handlers at whippet racing.

Some wee bookies could not afford the official entrance-fee into Shawfield Stadium so they started making a book outside the ground on the sodia-wastes, so called because it was a dumping ground for the notorious White's chemical works,[27] and hundreds of others. But the outside betting enterprise was quite successful. They were called the 'thrupny bookies'. From where they stood they could see the race results on the Shawfield tote board. Payment was made after every race and they had saved their entrance fee. While they would not admit it many of the old 'thruppny bookies' ended up working inside the track.

One of the most popular and spontaneous kinds of entertainment happened on the street and came from the many musicians and singers who frequented Brigton. There was a wide variety, starting from the poor badly-clad men and boys who would sing in the backcourts for a jeely piece[28] thrown down from a tenement window, or else a copper to make up the price of a bed for the night. Dotted around Glasgow at that time were hundreds of model-lodging houses. Then you had the more professional types who would be accompanied by a fiddler or an accordion player. One fellow would keep singing or playing while the other caught the coppers in a bunnet.

But there was no doubt about the most popular form of street entertainment. This was the semi-professional jazz bands that played in all the densely-populated streets throughout the district, usually on a Friday evening or a Saturday afternoon. These jazz bands usually had one or two singers, a set of drums and an accordion, plus a trumpet or saxophone. The singers had to have a very loud voice as of course no method of amplification was available.

Then there were the step-dancers who used their own board for the intricate steps they carried out. Another highlight was the dancers who disappeared up a close and come back out wearing some outrageous costume. They could do anything, from the sailors' hornpipes to the soft shoe shuffle. And there was always a Jolson singer who would blacken his face just like the original.

The acts often lasted an hour and hundreds of pennies were thrown from the crowded tenement windows that would be thronged with people getting a grandstand view of the whole performance. But most of the audience would be sitting on pavements with all the children sitting at the front, beginning from the smallest. People even sat on the roads. This was a period when poverty was a way of life for most people. It was amazing that when the performers finished and went round with the bunnets hundreds of coins came, much of it cascading down from the high-up tenement windows.

This was the 1930s and a street that was 150 yards long could house who knows how many hundreds of people, maybe thousands. You might wonder how such big events could take place on an open

[27] Info on White's notoriety in the Rutherglen district, facts on industrial disease etc?

[28] Bread and jam sandwich

street. For a start the street was closed off for the performance and also to my knowledge there was nobody who owned a motor car. The main traffic was horse-drawn. The only motor cars people ever saw were for funerals or maybe belonged to the doctor, or maybe a wedding was on.

There is no doubt the street perfomers did alright. A nice summer's Friday evening or a Saturday afternoon were the most popular times as there was maybe a copper left in purse or pocket after the broo money had been spent. Or maybe some of the punters had got a wee lift at the horses. One of the turns I remember well was the O'Leary Brothers[29] who later went onto grace the stage of theatres like the Metropole, the Queens, the Princess and the Scotia.

Benefit concerts were also held in the extended backcourts that existed in and around our area due to the demolition of derelict buildings, the old houses, old handloom mills and even blacksmith shops that had stood on the ground before the tenements were built. I remember one of the largest concerts in the 1930s was in aid of a woman who was charged with the murder of her husband. Her name was Baillie and she had several boys, one of whom I knew. As well as the usual amateur turns who gave the woman support several well-known personalities made appeals for help to defend her. Many of her supporters were there on the day of the benefit concert with petitions which most of the people signed. I had never seen such a crowd. Me and all the other wee boys were up on the roofs of the old washhouses, we had a good view of the huge audience and there must have been five or six hundred.

That was only one of the many concerts held on her behalf, not only in that backcourt but in many more. As far as I understand the campaign was quite successful and the charge was later reduced to manslaughter. The woman had a young family and the sentence was quite lenient.[30]

Undoubtedly the most popular pastime in that period, and the least expensive, was ballroom dancing. Most of the boys you went about with when you left school were already going to the dancing so you really could do nothing else but join in. You had to save up and get yourself a suit with long trousers and then get taught the

[29] O'Leary brothers, any info, other relevant stuff?

[30] Any info

rudiments of dancing without standing on your partner's feet. Glasgow was famous not only for the large number of venues that catered for the dancing public but for the high standards in dancing that prevailed. There were two types of dancers catered for, the younger element who took up modern dancing and the more mature dancers who were fond of what was described as 'select' or old-time dancing.

So all dressed up in my Cooperative suit I went with a boy I knew to enrol in the Dobson School of Dancing held at the Orange Halls in Cathedral Street. The lessons were given by Mr and Mrs Dobson who were quite strict and I must say within a few weeks you began to get the hang of it. And while you were no Gene Kelly at least the girls did not run away when they saw you coming up to ask them to dance.

The boy I went with was an apprentice joiner who had become a really good dancer. Then I found out he was taking extra lessons at the McEwan School of Dancing. But it was no big deal as far as I was concerned, the tanner a night lessons at Dobson's was good enough for me. We went around the more professional dancehalls. My pal could pick out at a glance the best lady dancer in the place and would try to get her up for every dance, till one night at the Dennistoun Palais the partner of one girl took exception to his continual approaches. The guy was a well-known amateur boxing champion and we had to beat a hasty retreat.

Every district had a public hall. Some districts like Brigton and Cathcart had two halls, both of them fully occupied with ballroom dancing on a Friday and Saturday night. There were three Glasgow evening papers in those days, the *Evening Times*, *Evening Citizen* and *Evening News*, and they carried several pages of adverts of all the dancing nights available in public halls. Then you had the small independent halls like the Stanley in Plantation, the Tower at the Round Toll in Possil Road, and the F. & F. in Dumbarton Road, Partick which later catered for roller-skating. Due to the popularity of dancing everybody wanted in on the act; even football clubs like Shawfield Juniors in Oatlands, the Strathclyde in Parkhead, and the Rutherglen Glencairn. Then of course you had the real status ballrooms like the Locarno in Sauchiehall Street, The Albert in Bath street, the Dennistoun Palais, and the Plaza at Eglinton Toll still going strong at the present day. All this was long before Fred

Astaire was even heard of. Then too there was the other dancehall, the Barrowland Ballroom. But in talking about the Barrowland we have to talk about Maggie McIvor, 'Queen of the Barras'.

Mrs Margaret McIver

Did Maggie McIvor Steal a Street?

MARGARET RUSSELL started business in a wee fruit shop next to the Star Picture House in Main Street, sometime after her marriage to James McIver in 1888. They moved to Green Street, Calton then to Marshall Lane in the Gallowgate, and started to hire out barrows for 1/6d per week to hawkers and street traders before the 1914/18 world war. She carried on the business after her husband was called up to the Armed Forces then extended it to horses and eventually to property.

That she was a very shrewd business woman was beyond doubt. When she opened up her first barrow site in Moncur Street in 1920 it was based on the present Barrowland ground. Some of the houses and factories had become derelict and were demolished, so Maggie McIver extended the site of the barrows. In 1923 electric lights were installed over the hawkers' stalls and in 1926 a roof erected over the whole place; in 1928 'the Barras' were enclosed.

Many people, including hawkers and Caltonians, have wondered for years what happened to the street called Calton Entry. It used to run parallel with Kent Street and was very narrow. From the Gallowgate it went south, crossing Moncur Street where it continued to Stevenson Street. This last wee bit is the only part remaining.

Calton Entry was scarcely about fifty yards in length and had about ten or twelve tenement closes. I suppose it would have been mainly hawkers and some old cotton-weavers that occupied the houses. In the late 1920s the tenement at the corner of Gibson Street and the Gallowgate into the Calton Entry, was demolished. Maggie McIver used the spare ground to expand her operation. She hired a barrow at 6d a day, occasionally double that for a Saturday. With the barrows in Moncur Street being one of the largest and most popular it was no surprise that when the remaining tenement was demolished the plan to build Barrowland took shape.

Her husband died in 1930 from malaria as a result of his war service but this did not deter her, and she pushed on with her ambition to build a modern dance hall over the market place. It was her boast that the whole enterprise was completed without an

architect, no surveyor, not even a contract but a shake of the hand. In 1934 the Barrowland Ballroom was completed and opened on Christmas Eve by the proud owner. Many local dignitaries attended, including Mr James Langmuir, Procurator Fiscal.

Maggie McIver did not restrict her activities and her oldest son Sammy opened up a secondhand car market under the Barrowland Ballroom from Monday till Friday. That it was the mecca for dancers during the whole week goes without saying when you consider how she brought in famous guest-bands like Jack Hylton, Henry Hall, Roy Fox and Teddy Joyce, and I remember seeing and hearing the jazz legend Coleman Hawkins there. Much later Lena Martell then Maggie Bell were resident singers with the Gaybirds Band.[31]

It must have come as quite a surprise to a few of the big business-men of that era, that a small, quite insignificant woman, not very young and with a growing family, could undertake such an enterprise. Those who really knew her from her early, meagre beginnings, had no doubt she would make it. In the process it could also be said of this shrewd business woman, that she managed to steal a street called Calton Entry.

My first recollection of the Calton Entry had not been of the street itself but of a gang of boys who hung about it and called themselves the Calton Entry Boys. I was a young schoolboy and along with a few other boys from Bernard Street we started to attend a gymnasium. It was situated in Saracen Head Lane, just up from the 'Serry Heid'.[32] Dr. Cossar ran the gymnasium on behalf of a religious organisation. His main function seemed to be finding wee boys prepared to emigrate to countries of the British Empire, like Canada, New Zealand and Australia where they were employed as labourers on farms.

Dr. Cossar was a tall, grey-haired man who wore a naval cap and a navy blue jersey, and he was very strict. If we laughed or jostled each other when we had been asked to join in prayers or sing hymns he would use a large belt across our legs or bottom. On a cold night you sometimes went home with your bare skin tingling.

[31] Dean Ford and the Gaylords eventually, they later became Marmalade and had major success in the pop charts with hits like the Beatles'-penned 'Obla dee oblada'.

[32] Or 'Sarry Heid' – the Saracen's Head, a popular pub in the Gallowgate apparently established since 1755.

I suppose we might have found the same type of gymnastic facilities nearer home but only if we joined a Boys Brigade company or a Boy Scout troop. Apart from being required to join a church the discipline and regimentation of these organisations did not appeal to me.

The only question Dr. Cossar ever asked was 'Are you a good Protestant?'

Even though I attended Sacred Heart School and was a Catholic I had no difficulty in saying 'Yes.'

One time we took a new wee boy from Bernard Street along with us. He kept tugging my jersey and saying to me quite determinedly 'But you're a fucking Catholic.' He only stopped when I gave his arm a good twist.

Dr Cossar spoke with great authority and conviction and he started pestering us to sign up for emigration but he never did persuade any of the boys from Bernard Street.

The Calton Entry Boys were mostly Catholics and felt it it was their duty to challenge the boys from Dr. Cossar's gymnasium as they made their way home. You were ambushed when you reached the bottom of Saracen Lane with loud shouts of 'Get those dirty Protestant bastards.' The Calton Entry Boys never managed to catch me but even the ones they did grab only got a slap or a kick on the arse and if you started to greet they all ran away. Their main thing was the chase itself and the shouting of 'fuck King Billy' and the defeat of his disciples, which was a joke when you consider the religion of our wee team. I never waited to explain I was a good Catholic, I doubt if it would have been appreciated, I was too busy beating Jack Lovelock's world record. I was always a better runner than fighter.

I have since learned that Dr. Cossar's gymnasium was only one of hundreds used by religious zealots and organisations to attract and entice young boys from poor homes into emigration. One of the leaders in this mass export of children was Dr. Barnado, followed by all the main Protestant religions, from the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society to the Salvation Army, on through the Roman Catholic Church. All in the name of religion, in most cases without the parents' consent, sometimes even without their knowledge. It was slave labour on a massive scale and started as far back as 1618 when the first children were sent to Richmond in

America. And it continued right through until 1967.[33] In excess of 150,000 children were sent to every corner of the British Empire without a voice of protest from any section of the media or establishment, and with the complete connivance of most of the churches and religious bodies.

[33] why did it stop in 1967 ?

THE ONLY public place that was available to practice gymnastics was over in the Glasgow Green across James Street from Fleshers Haugh.[34] It was an open air part of the green with a small pavilion with an open shelter. The gymnasium consisted of a few sets of bars for horizontal exercises, two sets of parallel bars, three sets of high chain rings and a vaulting horse. Apparently it had been donated by a local industrialist who felt that it would be beneficial to the young men who were unemployed. It really was a boon to them, but for the likes of younger boys like me, we had to wait until the young unemployed went home for their tea, before we could get the use of the equipment.

In the square mile about our street there was no public playing fields, there was no swings for weans, absolutely no facilities whatsoever for young people. There was not even a blade of grass to be seen. The nearest swimming baths were at Whitevale Street in Dennistoun and they were always busy, especially in the summer during the school holidays. There were of course Greenhead swimming baths adjacent to the Glasgow Green. It was these baths that I went to when we were taken by Sacred Heart Advance Central School where I was a pupil.

Later on it became by accident the first open-air swimming pool in Glasgow when they took the roof off to make way for an extension to Templeton's carpet factory. It remained off during the five years or so of the war and was used extensively by the people of the Calton even although they sometimes needed a bath after they had had a swim, it depended how the wind was blowing as Templeton's chimney often laid a nice film of soot on the surface. Of course a real open-air pool was planned for the Glasgow Green. The steel was delivered to the site adjacent to the present putting green, the barricades were put in place and excavations were started.

[34] In 1990 the Labour-controlled, Glasgow District Council tried to sell off a third of the historic Glasgow Green in the form of a 125 year lease to private property developers. For some further information see *The Reckoning*, Clydeside Press 1990.

But the only work that was ever done on that site was the red leading of the steel to preserve it until the war was finished. As one of the old wags used to say, it was a pity we didn't have a real Red Leader, unfortunately we only had Sir Patrick Dollan.[35]

Until I went to the above school at 10 years of age I never received swimming lessons but fortunately our family managed to get a holiday at the seaside during 'the Fair'[36] and I did manage to pick it up. It would have been an impossible task for our physical-training teacher at school to give any type of real tuition in the thirty minutes of our one weekly swimming period.

Most of the boys I played or went about with were football mad. While I did play on occasion I was more interested in running, gymnastics and boxing. If the game started when I was there and they were choosing teams I was not picked first although I always

[35] Sir Patrick Joseph Dollan (1885-1963); 'ex-miner; activist in labour and temperance movements. . . first Catholic Lord Provost of Glasgow. . . his mother's memories of the Irish famine, combined with her personal experience of poverty and class inequality left a marked impression on him. . . joined the ILP in 1908. . . severed his ties with Catholicism in 1911 and became a secularist.' Dollan was imprisoned for his anti-war stance during World War I and 'in 1922, after turning down an offer of a candidature [he] emerged as the chief architect of the ILP's spectacular electoral success in the General Election.' see William Knox and Helen Corr's biographical essay in *Scottish Labour Leaders 1918-1939*. Dollan's wife Agnes was very highly regarded by, amongst others, Harry McShane who also felt that she was 'held back by' her husband. Agnes was a comrade of Helen Crawfurd and Mary Barbour in the Rent Strike and they 'went on to form the Women's Peace Crusade in 1916.' [Knox 47] Later Agnes and Patrick were ridiculed for taking a knighthood and ladyship. 'Lady' Dollan then became involved, as did other notables of the Labour movement, including John McGovern, with the far-right and CIA-sponsored Moral Re-Armament.

[36] 'The Glasgow Fair' – the last fortnight in July; when Glasgow closes down for the summer and goes for its annual holiday. For decades the carnival and sideshows have always come to Glasgow Green for this period; during the European City of Culture fiasco in 1990 the showpeople were supportive of the struggle to save the 'Green from the Labour Council's attempt to sell it off to private developers.

got a game, I was quite heavy-built and I could run. The nearest football fields were in the Glasgow Green but it was usually five or six a side with a wee tanner baw we played, and the 'Green was too far away, too big and too busy, so we made use of the large backcourts in Walkinshaw Street, better known as the Booly, which was what everybody called it.

It was not surprising that football was very popular in Brigton as over a hundred years ago Fleschers' Haugh in the Glasgow Green saw the birth of Rangers in 1873 and Celtic in 1888. Only five minutes walk from Bernard Street lay Celtic Park itself. However, it was not only Senior teams like Celtic and Clyde that were located in the Brigton area you also had Intermediate teams like Bridgeton Waverley who played in Barrowfield Park next door to Parkhead. Other teams in the same league as 'Waverley were Strathclyde and also Parkhead Juniors who played at Helenvale Park and although Helenvale Park is still there Parkhead Juniors have disappeared along with the other two. There are two teams in the east end who were in the old Intermediate league and still exist; Rutherglen Glencairn and Cambuslang Rangers.

Events like Wimbledon or the Open Golf championships never came into our world. There was not a single wireless in the whole of Bernard Street as far as I knew. In those days we were out in the backcourts after a cup final or an international with our tanner ball. There was no chance of us with our 'Setirday-penny' ever affording to buy a football strip. Although we could not afford to pay the entrance we had a very wide choice of games to watch. The fourpence you paid at the boys' gate to watch Clyde or Celtic was beyond us but back then it was allowed for the paying public to lift young boys over the turnstyle gates without them having to pay. Most fathers took their sons to games but if my big brother James was not going to Parkhead I usually stood at the pay-in entrances along with dozens of other wee boys. We would keep asking 'Gonny gie us a lift mister?' and seldom were we refused. Of course we could always get in at Bridgeton Waverley's ground at Barrowfield which was easy access and nearer home. Their stadium was only protected by corrugated steel sheeting and it was always quite loose and not very well maintained.

It would be inappropriate when talking about football in the 1930s not to mention the Churches League teams. They also played

at the Fleschers' Haugh on Glasgow Green along with so many Juvenile and Secondary Juvenile teams, and also countless school teams and factory and works' teams. Sometimes there were not enough football pitches to play on. Other times some of the teams had to use the wash-houses in local backcourts to strip it. And then the players would race across to the pitches on the Fleshers Haugh. All kinds of teams began life here, professional and amateur, senior and junior, and thousands of footballers, from Patsy Gallacher to Kenny Dalglish, cut their battling teeth in the tough conditions.

Like most wee boys you went through the usual phases and when your favourite player or team was doing well you always wanted to emulate your idols. I was a Celtic follower and I can still rhyme the players of my favourite team off by heart.

John Thomson,
Cook, McGonnigle,
Wilson, McStay, Geatons,
Thomson, Thomson, McGrory, Scarf and Napier

It was probably one of the most famous teams ever, maybe more famous than 'the Lisbon Lions,'[37] not because of footballing achievement but the fact that John Thomson was accidentally killed when playing against Rangers.[38]

During that period a few of us decided to start a team of our own and as we all lived within a few closes of each other there did not seem to be any problem. So we called in a big boy, Neilly – I am not sure what his surname was – but he was quite a decent boy and known as being very honest. We extended the contributors till about ten or so boys were putting in money to the kitty. After a few weeks we began to wonder when we would be buying a real football as we knew there was over £1 in our funds. We kept asking Neilly about the ball and he kept saying 'All in good time' till eventually some of the boys wanted their money back. We were flabbergasted when he told us he had spent it. What on was what we wanted to know. When

[37] 'Lisbon Lions' – the name given to the Celtic team who won the European Cup in Portugal 1967. All bar one of the eleven players were locally born and raised within hailing distance of Celtic Park.

[38] info on Sam English and death of John Thomson?

we asked to see the ball or the strips all he could show us were bandages and liniment. That was what he went out and bought with the money. Big Neilly was in the Boys' Brigade so no wonder I never joined, although he went on to be a Captain.

It would not be possible to speak about street football in Bernard Street without mentioning a girl by the name of Tillie Cunningham. She stayed up our close and was older than me. She was not only the best girl footballer in the whole district, she was miles ahead of most of the boys. As a matter of fact when the boys were picking a team if Tillie was there she was usually chosen first. Although well-built she was a typical girl wearing a dress. No such items like jeans were available in those days. While her hair was always short she could head the ball with force and direction and she could kick the ball with both feet. As far as I recall she played for a ladies team from Rutherglen called Kelly's. I do not think Tillie's football career lasted long. The last I remember she was married with a growing family.

There were a few good players in our district, but they had to play on dirt pitches and not many made the major leagues. There was one boy who signed for Celtic but I doubt if he survived a season. Another young man, Willie Webb, did make it to senior football but it was for an English club. Of course there were many Intermediate and Junior players around.

The type of sport that did attract a large number of boys, including myself, was boxing. It was the era of the Benny Lynchs, the Jake Kilrains, Johnny McGrorys and many more. Boxing clubs were sprouting up all over Glasgow and old premises like churches and factories were being converted into boxing clubs. Also there were arenas like the Grove Stadium at Finnieston which were under the auspices of Johnny McMillan, ex featherweight champion. Then there was the LMS Rovers club where amateur championship contests were held.

Apart from the glamour of the ring it was a fact of life that if you lived in a tough district fighting was thought the best way to defend yourself. I did very little about it myself until one of my pals got a set of boxing gloves for his Christmas and our stairhead lobby became a ring for the half a dozen boys who lived up the close. Despite the complaints of the neighbours it kept us out the cold during the long winter nights. And it never got out of hand because

the boxing gloves were too big to really hurt you.

Later on, when I was a young apprentice plumber working on a building site, I met an apprentice bricklayer called Hughie Finnerty. His brother was the Scottish lightweight champion. Hughie did a little amateur boxing himself and was a member of McGhee's club in Parkhead. He took me along to join. I attended for quite a while and began to get the hang of the equipment, particularly the punch-balls and the skipping-ropes.

It was a very busy club and there was quite a number of boxers who fought regularly, both amateur and professional. There was not much tuition took place unless you were capable of entering a competition. The trainer was called 'Cumshy' Cameron. After taking part in a few wee club contests he asked me to enter a small competition in the LMS Rovers. I jumped at the chance. On the Saturday night I turned up with a new pair of baseball boots which was the cheap alternative to the real McCoy, actual leather boxing boots. The baseball boots were quite a tight fit but I thought they would ease off.

When I went into the main hall where the ring was I got the fright of my life. There were several hundred people from all over, shouting on the boys from their own clubs.

My opponent was a boy much smaller than me and apparently he had won a few fights due to his boxing skills. I was very nervous but the man in my corner told me to relax. This I could not do as my baseball boots were hurting my big toe and it made me flatfooted. I walked around the ring chasing that wee fair-headed boy. He danced about me like a fairy although his powder-puff blows were not hurting me at all. However, I was getting very embarrassed. No matter how many punches I threw at him he dodged them with ease, and in front of all these supporters of the noble art I felt a real dumbbell.

As the third and last round was reached my Second sponged my face and said 'Grab him and hold him in a clinch son, and then belt him.'

So as the bell went for the last round and my opponent danced towards me I managed to push him against the ropes and hit him a glancing blow. The referee stepped in and awarded the fight to the wee boy. I left the ring with a few shouts from the crowd ringing in my ear. I was sick with embarrassment and both my big toes were killing me with pain. Within a week both my big toenails had fallen off, so I could not attend the club for a few weeks. When I did return Cumshy Cameron told me he was quite pleased with my performance.

Well that was not my opinion. My bitter disappointment with my baptism at the noble art had disillusioned me. I got the feeling that perhaps my temperament did not equip me for the rigours of the boxing ring.

But when my feet returned to normal I attended the club again, although not so often. One night a trainer asked me if I wanted to give a boxer called Jim Devlin a short spar. He was a bantam weight so there did not seem much harm in it. We sparred around for a short time and I thought I was doing alright, having managed to hit him a few times. Then the trainer shouted 'Last three minutes.' Now when I moved towards Devlin he caught me one on the nose with a very hard right-hand punch. I tried not to show it but there was no doubt it had hurt me. I tried to land a blow in his direction but Cumshy Cameron stepped into the ring and stopped the fight. I was about to ask what was wrong when I felt the taste of salt in my mouth and discovered my white training vest was covered in blood, blood streaming out from my nose,

I do not remember what Cumshy said to Devlin although he did indicate his displeasure at the power of his punch and the fact that the guy had broken my nose. I was cleaned up and two cotton-wool pads were put on my nostrils. I did not say a word when I got home. My nose was swollen but the bleeding had stopped and there was really no pain. But my mother insisted that I was not going back to that club anymore. That was not the way I saw it. After all, I had boxed with a professional and had given as much as I received. And to some extent I regarded it as an honour that it had taken a champion to break my nose. However, I reckoned without my oldest brother, James. Him and Walter Scott, one of my cousins, went up to the boxing club and they warned Devlin that if he took a liberty with me again there would be a real confrontation, and no Marquis of Queensborough rules this time.

My broken nose did not alter my appearance. But I had to get an operation much much later (the 1990s) in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary when it became apparent the broken bone was obstructing my breathing. While I never went back to McGhee's club I retained

my interest in boxing and managed to see some of Scotland's favourite boxers, and there were many during the 1930s. However, as you get older you witness many of the fighters you always admired once they are over the hill and in very poor circumstances – in boxing parlance, shuffling along. I remember Benny Lynch as a can-boy when they were building Hillington Estate. I mentioned earlier the great Jake Kilrain, British middleweight champion, but who was working as a toller at one of the biggest tossing-schools on the banks of the Clyde. I also met a retired boxer called Paddy Docherty who had beaten Benny Lynch three times as an amateur. He was working as a handyman and cleaner in Pollok library.

Later when I was working with the Gas Board I had a mate called Alex Ferries who had been a flyweight boxer during the Benny Lynch era. He actually fought Lynch for the Scottish flyweight championship and was beaten on points. His purse for that fight was 30 shillings for fifteen rounds and Benny Lynch had given him an extra £I.

Alex lived in a small room and kitchen in Fielden Street off London Road. He was one of the nicest men you could meet, despite his broken nose, cauliflower ears and marked eyebrows, his 'earnings' from over two hundred fights. He was so gentle and soft spoken it was hard to believe that he had been a professional boxer. When you contrast the Alex Ferries of this world with the people behind-the-scenes in professional boxing, like the George Dingley[39] for instance, a manager and promotor of the late 1930s, there is no contest. It is another indictment of a system that brutalises people, all in pursuit of profit at any cost.

[39] George Dingley? any info here/

THE ONLY real gang activity I ever witnessed was when one gang invaded another gang's street or territory. In many cases it was a reprisal for some earlier affray where a member of the invading gang had been set about. The gang fight consisted of one group of boys, some as young as 8 or 9 years old, chasing the other boys and shouting 'cha-orge', at the same time as they threw stones or sticks. If they managed to catch somebody then they punched or kicked him. When the other gang saw this happening they re-grouped and made a countercharge to rescue the victim. It never lasted more than 15 minutes or so. Then someone would shout, 'Here comes the polis' and it was all over. There may have been serious injuries suffered but I cannot recall any.

While I never was a member or went about with any gang I was a Catholic in a predominatly Protestant district and that meant you had to be prepared to defend yourself if you were attacked. As many of the boys I played with were Protestants, and my mother was one as well, I never had any hang-ups about religion. The one definite occasion I got involved in fights about religion was St Patrick's day. At my school it was a holiday of Obligation and we went to the chapel with a sprig of shamrock pinned to our jerseys.

When we walked past John Street school in Hozier Street we were regularly challenged by the 'toffs'. We called them that because they wore a school uniform. They would surround us and shout 'A Billy or A Dan?' Some of the smaller boys usually cried and ran away. I could never do that and no matter the odds most of us stood our ground and gave as much as we got.

In all the years I lived in Brigton these were the only times I can remember when it was my religion that caused the fight. But it unfortunately was true that I did seem to fight a lot, and regularly some boy would be saying to me, 'I'll see you after four.' And many a time I regretted turning up because I was not a big boy and those I seemed to challenge were older and bigger than me. And of course when my mother saw the torn jersey and bleeding nose there was no pictures for me on Saturday.

In the tough environment that was part and parcel of my upbringing I felt that you had no alternative but face the bully or there would be no end to it. I remember once I was fighting a big boy called Jackson round a backcourt off Dalmarnock Road. It was an old cobbled back. At one point he went to grab me after I hit him but he tripped and hit his nose on an iron clothes pole, just as a woman came down the backstairs and was shouting at him

'Away you go and leave the wee boy alone, you should be ashamed of yourself.' I did not wait, I grabbed my school bag and left, looking back to see Jackson holding his nose.

But one of the most brutal things I ever remember seeing was a bare-knuckle fight at Emery's farm on the banks of the Clyde. It was between two men, both stripped to the waist. One was quite tall, about 19 or 20 years of age. The other was a small man, heavily built and older, probably in his late twenties or hitting thirty. Within a few minutes the body of the shorter man was covered in blood as the tall man had burst his nose with the first torrent of punches. It seemed so one-sided. But despite being put on the ground repeatedly the wee man kept getting up and rushing the younger man. This must have went on for at least 20 minutes or a half an hour and the crowd were calling for it to stop. But whenever somebody stepped in to try to end it the wee man punched him away and again kept rushing at his opponent.

Eventually he was back down on the ground once again and the tall young man stepped forward and, after helping him to his feet, he held out his hand and said 'Alright you win Johnny'. The wee man wiped the blood from his body with his shirt. The next thing was a bunnet was put round the crowd and the cash proceeds were divided between the two protagonists. They smoked a Woodbine together then the crowd left the scene. I found out much later that the older guy was the notorious Johnny Phillips. He always stood at Bridgeton Cross and issued challenges at the drop of a hat. Regularly he got jailed for breach of the peace. He survived right into his late fifties then he died while in 'police custody'. But that bare-knuckle battle was a more common agenda than the headline-grabbing talk of gangs and gang fights.

Many observations have been made about the Glasgow street gangs of the 1930s and books both factual and fictional have been written about them. Speaking as a teenager in the late thirties I do

not recognise the characters described in books like *No Mean City*. I never saw or even heard of any individual gang-member strutting about the street with two open razors sticking out of his waistcoat pocket. It makes you smile when you read about the exploits of the so-called 'Gangbuster' Chief Constable, Percy Sillitoe. Regarding his claims that he had smashed the Glasgow street gangs, as a young boy I once saw a single policeman appear in a street where two gangs were having a confrontation and both groups of so-called gangsters disappeared like snaw aff a dyke.

That Brigton and the east end were tough areas goes without saying but anyone who used a razor, a knife or an axe was ostracized. And if it was clear that a 'liberty' had been taken some of the local hard men who did not require weapons had a 'quiet word' with the culprits. The largest and best known gang was undoubtedly the Billy Boys who stood at Brigton Cross. Their praises still get sang about every Saturday at Ibrox Park. Nearly seventy years after I first heard it sung, as a person who had a Catholic upbringing, it still hurts when I hear the tens of thousands of Rangers' supporters singing 'Up to the knees in Fenian blood surrender or you'll die'.

Of course in Brigton and the east end you had probably more gangs than anywhere else in Glasgow. There were the Sally Boys from Salamanca Street, Parkhead and then the Norman Conqs from Norman Street in Dalmarnock. Also you had the Chanty Boys from Fraser Street, off London Road and there were gatherings of older men at street corners in Bernard Street and they were known as the Stickit. The Baltic Fleet came from Baltic Street and the Nunny Boys came from Nuneaton Street, both in Dalmarnock. From the Calton you had the San Toy, The Tongs, the Tiny Tongs and the Calton Entry Boys. I heard about the Cumbie from Cumberland Street, and the Bee Hives also from the south side, and then there was the Cheeky Forty from Garngad. No doubt there were many more in all the other districts that I had never heard about. The above-mentioned were only street gangs and as far as I know many of them had a majority of Roman Catholics in their ranks.

The only time I did see weapons used was when an Orange Walk went through Bernard Street. Despite the fact that most of the residents were Protestants the majority were not sympathetic to the Orange Walk and resented them taking the march into Bernard Street. Some of the Stickit Boys were standing peacefully at the

corner of Marquis Street on this occasion. When some of the Billy Boys who were in the Walk started to attack them the whole procession was brought to a halt. Hundreds of fights broke out all along the street and weapons were definitely used. This I do know as my sister Peggy went to the aid of a young man who had sought shelter in our close when chased by the Billy Boys. He was bleeding profusely from a head wound caused by an axe. We took him into our house and gave him a cup of tea after bandaging his head. To my knowledge that was the last time an Orange Walk ever went through Bernard Street.[40]

There is no doubt that Billy Fulton was the best known gang member. He was regarded as the leader of the Billy Boys, particularly after Chief Constable Sillittoe was interviewed by many newspapers. I do not know where or when Billy Fulton led anybody. I passed Brigton Cross nearly every day of the week and anytime I saw him he was standing at the corner of Orr Street and London Road, laughing and joking with a crowd of young men.

The only time I gave the Brigton Cross a miss was on a Saturday afternoon when the Celtic supporters were coming from Parkhead because you could be sure there would be a confrontation. There was also another gang at Brigton Cross called the Derry Boys. They were the youth section and were equally as vehement against Celtic supporters. The highlight of their year's activity was the 12th of July when they participated in the Orange Walk, even although the officials of the Orange order did not openly recognise them.

Despite the fact that his father was a Shop Steward in a factory in Dagenham, and apparently a left-wing one, Chief Constable Percy Sillitoe seemed to reserve his hatred for politically-motivated activists. He went onto become the head of the Secret Service.[41]

[40] but see McIvor and Paterson's essay 'Combating the Left: Victimisation and Anti-Labour Activities on Clydeside, 1900-1939' [from *Militant Workers*, edited by Duncan and McIvor] that during the earlier part of the twentieth century 'the delinquent wing of the Orange order campaigned vigorously and violently against socialist meetings. . . Orange disruption of socialist gatherings continued into the 1920s and 1930s with, for example, the notorious Billy Boys especially in the Glasgow East End. . .'

[41] Sir Percy Sillitoe was appointed Director-General of MI5 1946-53, by the post-war Labour Government and held the office during

Prior to coming to Glasgow he spent some time as a trooper in the South African police force, a private organisation controlled by the British South African Company. He was stationed in Salisbury where much of the police activity was of a military nature, controlling the Matabeles. So his formative years were spent as a military policeman putting down rebellions by natives.

His first experience as a Chief Constable was in Chesterfield from 1923 then in 1926 he moved to Sheffield, and on to Glasgow in 1931. Sillitoe was regarded as a Chief Constable who could get results and his reputation extended far and wide. However, while there were similarities between Sheffield and Glasgow it was obvious from his attitude that he did not realise the extent to which the 1930s slump had affected the social conditions in Glasgow.

He dismissed the unemployed workers who had the courage to take to the streets and also dismissed the people who spoke on their behalf, men like John McLean,[42] Peter Colin Blair McIntyre,[43]

a period of spying scandals, including those involving Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess; '. . .the implications of Maclean's escape and Burgess's defection were enormous. News of the disaster quickly reached the newspapers and the FBI Director, Hoover, summoned Sillitoe to Washington to explain what had gone wrong.' (see *A Matter of Trust: MI5 1945-72* by 'Nigel West' (alias Rupert Allason, Tory MP) Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1982. In *No Mean Fighter* McShane tells us, 'Sillitoe was probably the most diplomatic of all the chief constables we had, but he had a rough passage from time to time from the unemployed. . .' [195] On one occasion in 1933 he was giving a talk to the unemployed in the old picture house down in Vine Street, Partick, 'recounting some of his big game experiences in Africa' but when he held up his rifle to show how he shot a tiger. . . men got up all over the hall shouting, Bang! In the middle of the uproar someone shouted, 'Tell us the one about the three bears!' and there was pandemonium.

[42] John Maclean [1879-1923]. More than a decade after his death, in his Introduction to Wal Hannington's *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936*, Tom Mann still felt the urge to 'raise my hat in reverence – John Maclean of Glasgow – a splendid man and fearless fighter, who literally died for the cause. . .'

[43] Peter McIntyre was 'a member of the Scottish Workers' Republican Party which had been founded by John Maclean. See the biography by Nan Milton [John Maclean's daughter].

Harry McShane and Guy Aldred.[44] He referred to them all simply as 'Communist agitators'. To anybody who advocated left wing solutions to social issues like bad housing, unemployment and poverty, Sillitoe's attitude was totally authoritarian. He showed hostility towards any attempt to organise and educate politically the victims of the slump.

Most despicable was his treatment of a retired barber called Petrie, alias 'The Clincher', a well-known Glasgow character who was active in the Free Speech campaign.[45] 'The Clincher' had spoken out for years at the Speakers' Corner, accusing Glasgow Councillors of corruption. In company with his comrade Peter McIntyre and alongside Guy Aldred he urged the unemployed workers to rise up against the system and take to the streets.

Sillitoe eventually managed to get 'The Clincher' incarcerated illegally in Forest Hall,[46] by saying that he was mentally retarded. Then he actually tried to have the man certified insane, using a method not unlike the kind operated in Russia to permanently intern critics and opponents of the system. 'The Clincher' was left having to prove his sanity. But the Court decided in his favour and afterwards he carried the certificate about with him, he became the only man in Glasgow who carried a certificate to prove he was sane.

Along with Guy Aldred, Peter McIntyre was one of the first of the early Socialists to call for rent strikes and for homeless people to occupy empty property. When the police found out he himself was occupying an empty house in one of the better parts of Govan without paying any rent they tried to evict him. Peter and his comrades cut down a large tree and rammed it from the back door

[44] Guy Aldred [1886-1963], like Maclean, a pivotal figure; London-born and bred; 'Boy Preacher, Social Democrat, Prisoner of Conscience (repeatedly), Conscientious Objector, Anarcho-Communist, orator, writer, publisher. . .' see John Taylor Caldwell's biography, *Come Dungeons Dark*. A comprehensive selection of Aldred's own writings has been in the pipeline by AK Press for a while.

[45] See also J.T.Caldwell's informative essay, 'The Battle For The Green' for more on the Free Speech fights; Caldwell's writings are also recommended for a view of McShane and others from an anarchist perspective.

[46] Anything more to be said about The Clincher? Forest Hall hospital info?

right the way through the hall all the way to the front door, to thwart the police. It is true that in the 1950s, when he was an old man, Peter McIntyre came back as an elected councillor. Despite holding open-air meetings at Govan Cross he failed to make any impact in the council.

Hugh Savage – a studio picture aged 18

Part 2

Work and Growing up, Serving your Time

WHEN I approached my fourteenth birthday I had made up my mind to leave school. It was not a difficult decision to make as in no way could I be described as an intellectual. It seemed to be my misfortune to be stuck firmly in the middle of the class. In subjects like English, geography and history I was above average but on most other subjects, except physical training, I languished in the lower half. While in no way blaming any of the teachers for my failure, none of them ever impressed me, right through nine years of education.

And many of them I hated, particularly the priests I had when I first went to Sacred Heart. There were two of them, Father Francis and Father Bernard. When they reached into their robes and pulled out the black three-tonged strap it was really frightening. And when they made you double your hands and then gave sometimes six lashes, very few boys could hold back the tears. What worried me was the fact they seemed to feel so pleased, as if it was a job well done. As one who got his share of that belt I can say your hand was sore for days and on one occasion when my mother noticed how black and blue it was she said if it happened again she would take it up with the headmaster. Afraid of the retribution I kept my hands well out of sight from her in future.

The priests were not alone of course, most of the other teachers had no interest in their pupils. Either you kept up with the best in the class or you fell by the wayside. I could not get out of school fast enough.

The first week after my fourteenth birthday I started to work my way around the factories in Brigton looking for a job. It was my first experience of discrimination. I began at the Acme Wringer Company, then Templeton's Carpets, Tullis and Martin's leather-works and so on. In all I must have went to nearly twenty factories and all said the same, 'What school did you go to?' There was I with my new short trousers and shoes, my best woollen jersey and

shirt and tie, a wee boy looking for his first job, and all these people could think about was what religion I was. Probably that was the first time I became angry. Not with the bigots that were denying me a job because of religion, but the whole stupidity that divided people in their way through life.

The next thing I did was attend the vacancy section at the Labour Exchange in Megan Street off Dalmarnock Road. The first day there I got a green-card to go and see about a job for a message boy at the bottom of Saltmarket. It was a golf shop based in one of the tenements that you had to approach by going upstairs right at the front of the building. It was owned by a professional golfer named J.T.Donaldson. He had won several tournaments and now gave golfing lessons. He also manufactured and repaired golf clubs.

He was a very nice man in his fifties with red hair and he always wore tweed plus-fours. My main job was to deliver clubs to warehouses like Rattray's in Candleriggs and French's off Argyle Street, and many more. I also carried clubs and golf bags along to a new shop opened by J. Letters in Main Street, Gorbals. He later became a very big name in the golfing world with many top players using his clubs.

My boss was a very unassuming man who had a liking for a good dram, and he seemed to thrive with plenty of people around him. He stayed in a small house in Oatlands and worked long hours, not only making golf clubs himself but travelling to many courses giving lessons. His favourite was the old Turnberry course where his long-time friend Jimmy McDowall was the Club professional. It was a regular journey once or twice a month to catch the first train from the old St Enoch Station to Girvan and then he took a taxi from there to Turnberry.

In those days Turnberry was owned by LMS railways along with top class hotels like Gleneagles, the Glasgow Central and many more. J.T.Donaldson assisted his friend on the Turnberry course giving golfing lessons. But I think my boss looked forward to it as a day away from what was for him a long and hard working shift in Glasgow. And of course he always carried his wee whisky flask, purely for medical purposes, for when they reached the 19th hole. He never spoke about the people he gave lessons to but once he did mention somebody. This was Lady Bird of the famous custard people. Apparently she got under his skin and he said it would be

the last time he would go back to Turnberry if she was one of his pupils. In those days only the real *créme de la créme* could afford to stay there.

J.T.Donaldson liked golfing stories and one of his favourite was the one that Henry Longhurst wrote about when Walter Hagen and Gene Sarazen tied in the final of the British Open and the play-off was scheduled early the next morning. Longhurst was staying in the Turnberry Hotel with them. Passing the residents' lounge well past 12 midnight he was surprised to see Walter Hagen laughing and drinking with a number of very attractive lady friends. Hagen greeted Longhurst as he walked past and asked him if he wanted a refreshment. 'No thank you' said Longhurst 'but do you know that Gene Sarazen has been up in his bed since 7 o'clock?'

'Yes Henry, but he sure aint sleeping.'

J.T.Donaldson loved golf. He had a small practice room and nets in the back shop where he gave lessons most days. My time was taken up in the morning delivering clubs and bags, and generally going messages but I also started to fit grips onto the clubs and to sandpaper woods for the French polishers. And if there was nothing for me to do the boss did not object if I practiced at the nets. You used real golf balls and there was a reinforced canvas with a bulls-eye target that you aimed at. So with watching the many good golfers who came about the shop, and with some basic instructions from the boss, I developed as a good striker of the ball without ever setting eyes on a golf course. He eventually gave me an old secondhand set for myself but I was too self conscious to take them home. I would not be seen walking into Bernard Street carrying golf clubs. In those days golf was regarded as a toffs' game. At least that was what I thought.

Saltmarket was one of the busiest streets in Glasgow in those days, with hundreds of people passing your doors and before street-trading was licenced most of the street corners had a barrow selling some kind of food, from fruit and fish to hot chestnuts. My first job in the morning after the shop opened was to fix the two showcases atop with two large golf balls to the railings at the bottom of the stairs.

The boss was a good mixer and all sort of characters came about the shop. A regular was the well-known Mickey Casey. He had been quite a dandy in his day but drink and the good life – with a few

fights and rough and tumbles thrown in – had left poor Mickey with a slight deficiency. He was completely harmless and for a few shillings some of the bookies and shopkeepers would give him some suit or costume or other to wear for a dare. Some days he would be dressed in full evening-wear, other days he would be done up as a kiltie in full highland regalia, or else he would be like Charlie Chaplin with a bowler hat. There was always crowds of children following him. While he sometimes carried a cane he never was violent and the police treated him with respect. Unless he had become intoxicated. Then he was given a bed for the night. Or if he was fined some of the local shopkeepers would pay his fine. Every morning the famous florist Mary Fox put a fresh flower in the buttonhole of whatever costume he was wearing. There were so many characters from that period, including the Clincher himself who I well remember seeing with his top hat and cane, selling his paper,–*The Clincher*, at the corner of Argyle Street and St Enoch Square.

Some of the men who frequented the golf shop used to take the hickery tips that I cut off the top of the clubs and do practical jokes. They put a small bent nail through them, cut a cigarette packet into a windmill and attached it to the nail. They would stand next to our showcases at the bottom of the front door and one of them would ask a passerby for a light. In those days most men wore caps or bunnets. When the man held up his fag to give a light, a windmill with a nail would be attached to the back of his bunnet and the poor unsuspecting fellow would stroll up the Saltmarket with his windmill belting away, wondering why he was being stared at. I can never recall anyone getting annoyed, we seemed to be more tolerant in those days.

One of the men who regularly gave us a visit was a very nice grey-haired man who lived round the corner in Steele Street. He was badly deformed and had very bad legs that must have reduced his height by more than 18 inches. His name was Mr McFarlane and his son was the famous Willie McFarlane who won the Powderhall Sprint[47] a record number of times and in his own day was the fastest man in the world. The boss told me that young Willie

[47] The Powderhall Sprint took place annually in Edinburgh at the Powderhall Stadium. The 'sprint' was a handicap race for professional athletes and a great betting event.

and his pals played football in Steele Street in the evenings or Sundays. The Central Police station was just round the corner and the boys were regularly chased by the polis, but they could never manage to confiscate the ball. Every time they came Willie seized it and ran right into the Glasgow Green. None of the cops could ever catch him. This really annoyed them. Eventually they got one of their beat-police who was an amateur athlete, so he could get after Willie, but he was not successful either. After making enquiries he approached the family and at the end of it all I think it was him got Willie Mcfarlane to take the running up seriously,.

In many respects the job with J.T.Donaldson was probably the most interesting and satisfying I ever had. But fate played me a dirty trick. The man who did the French polishing of the wooden clubs lived in a house above the shop and my last job before I left at night was to take him all the clubs that were required to be polished urgently. He lived two stairs up and I used to dive up the stairs and down again, unfortunately I had a habit of leaving the back door of the shop open for the few minutes necessary. One morning when I came in the boss confronted me. A very expensive leather golf-bag was missing and the only explanation was that someone had taken advantage of me leaving the door open the night before and had come in and stolen it.

I could not believe it as I was a very fit wee boy and fast, I could jump the stairs four at a time. I had never seen anyone near the door. The boss said he had warned me before about this happening, which was true. By that time I was crying and I told him I would just leave and get another job and I would try to pay for the bag. The boss said there was no need for that and I could carry on. However, I put on my jacket and walked away. I did not wait for the wages I was due. I went greeting along through the Glasgow Green then I reached Megan Street and the employment exchange. I wiped my tears away, walked into the vacancy section and asked if they had any jobs. They gave me a green-card for a paperworks in Moncur Street, Calton. I went right up immediately and got a start for the very next day. By the time I got home my mother was frantic.
'Where have you been?'

'Away gettin a job.'

'But you've got a job.'

I told her what had happened about the golf bag and everything.

Then she floored me. 'Mr Donaldson has been up to the house. There was no bag stolen. He just wanted to learn you a lesson.'

I started to cry again. 'You mean to say he told me a lie?'

That destroyed my wee world, I would never work for him again, no matter what he offered me. My mother tried to coax me but there was no way I could ever trust a person who could hurt a wee boy that had looked up to him like I did. I never saw J.T.Donaldson in my lfe again. I never took the secondhand set of clubs he gave me either and do not know what happened to the business.

SO I started with the firm of Dunlop & Jack at their premises in Moncur Street and it was my first experience of pulling a barrow. My job was to deliver toilet rolls to hardware shops and uplift paper and deliver it to printers all over Glasgow. It was a very light barrow but when you carried several reams of brown paper inside it became quite a pull going up places like the High Street. Fortunately there were plenty of horse-drawn carts in those days and the carter let you hook the barrow onto the back of his cart if your load was really heavy. I suppose my eight shillings a week wage was much less expensive than it took to keep a horse.

I did spend some time in the factory with the other few boys making up toilet rolls and parcelling orders. It was close to the Moncur Street barrows and on a Saturday morning while waiting on the factory opening I used to give some of the stall-holders a hand to set up their wares. I was intrigued by their methods and activity, the speed with which they set up the stalls with row after row of blooming apples interspersed with oranges, bananas and other fruits. I had never seen anything like it before.

The most famous stall was *Mary Ann's*. At first I thought Mary Ann was the small woman with the loud voice who wore men's boots all time. I soon found out that it was the other, older woman who wore expensive cardigans and very expensive rings and brooches. The highlight of their operation was the sale of bags of fruit. The small woman with the loud voice would shout, 'Number one and number two' and so on down the rows until the bag was full of assorted fruit. Then she would shout 'Who'll gie me two bob. Never mind two bob, who'll gie me wan and a tanner!'

Then the hands started to go up and dozens of people walked away with bags of fruit. For years after I left the Calton job I still saw the wee woman, pulling a big barrow filled with fruit and vegetables into the city centre where they had a corner barrow stall. I never knew her name but Mary Ann was a very fortunate fruit hawker to have had such a faithful and dedicated grafter.

My job at Dunlop & Jacks was not very interesting and the

pulling of the barrow through the Glasgow streets was beginning to get me down. I had begun to take an interest in clothes and I found the few bob I got for pocket money did not go very far. I started looking for another job. I heard that a firm in Rutherglen was looking for boys and the starting wage was 14/- per week compared to the 8/- I was getting. The firm was the well-known British Wire Rope Works at Farm Cross. I just asked for an hour off my work and went for an interview with them and the foreman asked me to start on Monday, so I handed in my notice and left Dunlop & Jacks on Saturday.

As I rode on my bike along Dalmarnock Road to my new job I kept thinking what I would do with the extra pocket money that would come my way. I was not prepared for the noise in the factory when I stepped through the doors to clock in. It was really deafening and the different types of machines confused me. Once the gaffer took me to the machine that I was to operate it was much better. There were quite a few new-starts like me and they seemed to master it quite well. The machine was a winder, not unlike the operation that took place in my mother's cotton mills, although this time it was wire we were winding, not thread.

The foreman was a nice pleasant man and very patient. After an hour or so of basic instruction he told the boy next to me to keep his eye on me. It all seemed quite simple. I was in control of a machine that took the wire off a large wooden reel and rolled it onto a small bobbin. When full it was ready to be placed in the large machines along with many other bobbins. Depending on the diameter it would be spliced through the machine to make wire-rope, sometimes over 2" thick. After a couple of days it seemed easy enough. Most of the workers in this section were boys of my own age and they were all very helpful.

The days seemed to pass quite fast. The British Wire Rope Works sent their products not only throughout the United Kingdom but to the far east and to Australia and Canada, so there was always plenty of orders to fulfil and there must have been about a hundred workers. That was excluding those in the offices who worked in a very distinctive building right on Farm Cross which, after decades of demolition and closures, is the only part of the works still standing.

I struck up a friendship with a wee boy called Bertie, my nearest

workmate on the winding section. After we had our pieces at dinnertime he took me to the football game at the back of the works. This was the highlight of the day. Bertie was a good wee player, very tricky. He told me he had been in his school team and they had reached the schoolboys' semi-final championship. I could believe that, I could tell it by the way he played.

There was no betting took place in those wee games but it was still quite competitive, and there was about seven or eight a-side. I did not expect to get playing that first time but they were short and asked me on. While I did not set the heather on fire I must have done alright as it became a regular event. Wee Bertie was pleased. His big pal Doddie ran the game and took care of the ball. I became a regular player and we formed a friendly group.

Doddie was mad about football as well. Although he was overweight he really must have played the game to a good level because when he got the ball he was dominant. He was also well-built. He always picked Bertie and me in his team if he could and he came and took his tea with us. If we had any trouble with our machines he helped to get them working again. Doddie seemed to look after wee Bertie. They both came from Cambuslang and they went on the same tram home together.

There was another man about twenty five years of age who operated the nearest large machine to our wee section. I was sure I knew him from somewhere, he was always very tidy in his appearance. It turned out he stayed in my part of Brigton and his name was Crawford. I passed him morning and evening, when he was walking home and I was cycling. I never paid him much attention. He seemed a bit of a loner, always taking his piece by the machine on his own, never coming to watch the football. For no reason he started to throw bits of waste at me and Bertie when we were bending over our machines. We tried to ignore him. Then one day Bertie let out a cry and started shouting at the man. I went down to see what had happened and he told me that when he bent over his machine Crawford had stuck a pin into his backside. Crawford denied it. There was a piece of metal bar I used to tighten up my bobbin. After that, if I saw Crawford coming I kept it in my hand until he passed. I told him if he came near me I would belt him with it.

Apparently this had been going on for a long time and he

seemed to get pleasure out of it. It is a fact that you cannot be vigilant all of the time and the following week, one afternoon we had come back in from the football, I was leaning over my machine and I did not see Crawford at my back, he stuck me with a pin. I let out a yell. I turned roundabout and saw him moving sharply back to his machine. I threw the metal bar at him, it just missed his shoulder. But just as I walked towards him the gaffer came into the passage and I had to go back to my work. Crawford had pushed the pin in so far it drew blood.

I told wee Bertie what had happened and he said something must be done about it. Things were quiet for a few days then one afternoon I saw Doddie approaching Crawford. He told him in no uncertain manner if he did not stop annoying and bullying the boys he would be sorted out. The very next day me and Bertie were round reloading the large reels into position and I left him to get a drink of water. As I made my way back I could see Crawford walking to the back of our machines and I hurried faster, then I heard Bert crying. Crawford had a hold of his arm and was twisting it up his back. I took a few more strides and as hard as I could I sunk my boot into his arse. He made an attempt to come at me but I grabbed the iron bar and I said to him 'This time I willni miss.'

I gave Bertie a lift up and he was in pain, but we decided not to tell the gaffer. Our pal Doddie sorted Crawford out when he was leaving the works that night, and that was the end of his days as a bully. He approached me the next morning and said he was sorry and he did not mean any harm. Later I discovered he was in the Salvation Army, so was his mother and father, and his young brother played in their band. I saw him on many occasions marching in the ranks, long after I had left the British Wire Rope Works.

WHEN I reached my sixteenth birthday the time had come to start my apprenticeship as a plumber with the firm that employed my big brother Walter. I gave my notice into the Wire Rope Works and on the first working day after the Christmas and New Year holidays I began serving my time. The firm of plumbers and electricians I worked for was called John Irving and Sons and was based at Victoria Road, across from Larkfield bus depot. It was the farthest I had ever worked away from home.

When I set off with my big brother I assumed I would start with menial tasks in and around the workshop, which was what Walter had told me. So with a brand new pair of bib-overhauls and my piece and my new tea-can, and my 3 ft. wooden Rabone rule, I stepped into the workshop. To my surprise, between the apprentices of various ages and journeymen there were over twenty other guys about to start work. One of them was a plumber called Willie Hunter. I was told by the foreman this was my mate and we were going to work at a new church being built at Cardonald.

When I walked out of John Irving's premises that morning with my new overhauls on and carrying the tools I felt quite proud, particularly since it was my mother's wish being fulfilled. She always said that all of us would learn a trade. My entry into plumbing meant there were now two plumbers and a joiner in the family.

On the journey to Cardonald I discovered that my mate stayed in Mathieson Street in the south side. Willie Hunter was a man in his late forties and had two daughters. We arrived at the church building site and while he was talking to the site foreman I was told to put the tools in one of the huts and wait. In a short time we started to take the cast iron U.G. gutters from the back of the hut to the side of the newly-erected church. Our first job was to fit the gutters to allow the roof to be slated. After an hour or so Willie told me to get the can on for both of us. I boiled up at the joiners' fire then shouted on him, and we sat on the joiners' wood pile up outside the huts and enjoyed our lunch.

Sitting in the yellow tramcar taking me home I really felt quite

content, and fortunate that my mate was a nice man. It had been hard work carrying these cast-iron gutters onto the roof but when you looked up and saw the brand new gutters on the new church building you felt satisfied.

Within a few days the next operation started. This was taking the rainwater down-pipes down to meet the fireclay drains, and fitting in the soil-pipes to take in connections for the wash-hand basins, sinks and w.c.s. I found out the hard way that when you are dooking holes in the outside walls to take the holdfasts that hold the cast-iron pipes, you have to keep your eye on the head of the dooking iron. The first day on that work my left hand was badly bruised after several hours of chiselling holes in the wall. When I got home my mother bandaged my hand and gave me a left handed glove to save me further damage.

We were on the church job for quite a few weeks. We got so far ahead Mr Jim Irving, one of the sons, told us to come back into the shop on Monday morning to do repairs till the job was ready for the next stage. My mate Willie Hunter was given the repairs, the burst pipes, choked drains, washers etc. while I was given the job of melting down old lead into a big cast-iron pot which was placed on the charcoal fire in the backshop.The hot lead was then poured into steel ingot pots which when cold weighed a quarter of a cwt. These were built up in the workshop to await the arrival of the lead manufacturer. Apparently ingots sold in this way were twice as valuable. It was quite boring work but it allowed me to speak to the other apperentices and get to know them and the rest of the plumbers working there.

It was around this time I was introduced to my number one enemy, the Irving barrow. It was a huge thing with large heavy wheels and a rope between the shafts so that it could be pulled up hills. It made the small barrow I had had at Dunlop & Jacks look and feel like a scooter. My first job with the barrow was when Willie and myself had to load it up for a job at the old Halfway house in Paisley Road.

The most direct road to our destination was to head for Mosspark Boulevard. As it was a climb all the way I consoled myself that it would be downhill on the way back. Willie was kind of slight in build and really did not assist me much. The first time I saw a horse and cart going in our direction I asked the carter if it would

be alright if I hooked onto the back of his cart. There was no trouble and we got to the Halfway pub just in time for our piece. After dinner we started to strip out what I took to be the old lead pipe in the attic. As I started to put it alongside the old lead waterpipe Willie said 'No son, this is block tin and it has to be kept separate.'

He explained that it had about the same value as silver. At three o'clock the boss appeared with bags. I had to put all the block tin in them, then hide it all under the lead and take it back to the shop, and I was not to let the guy in charge of the pub see me doing it. I never gave the boss' remarks much consideration. That afternoon I did not get back to the shop until after 5 pm. The workshop was closed but the girl in the office let me take the barrow in. It did not seem right to me that there were at least three cars amongst the three Irving sons but they still could not afford a van to transport all the waste-pipes and soil-pipes, putty for fitting taps, gratings to the sanitary fittings, slate nails for fitting lead aprons around the chimney stocks on the roof, boss-white for sealing joints on the brass fittings, and all the other essential material that was needed for the work. It was my first experience with the barrow but most certainly not my last. I had spent five hours pushing and pulling the thing. I made several more trips to Halfway taking a load of block tin and lead away every time.

We eventually finished the job there and we were sent to another one, the State Bar in Holland Street. A new 'Spanish' lounge had to be fitted into the old beer cellar without interfering with the pub's normal functioning, and it was always very busy. The job was very complicated. This put a lot of strain on Willie Hunter and when he got excited he had a bad stammer. I had to calm him down and reassure him that he was doing okay. Then we had to re-line a lead storage system above the staircase entry to a billiard and snooker hall.4 Willie was not agile and the only way inside the cistern was to step up a 10 ft. ladder and squeeze through a 12 inch space. I had to do it. Once inside there was plenty of room, it was least 6ft. x 4ft.

I stripped the old lead out and lowered it with a rope to the ground. Willie tied on the new lead which had been cut to size. I pulled it up and fitted on the bottom and sides. He then gave me in the solder and the blow lamp and I started to solder the joints and draw off points. Willie had the tea-cans going by this time.

The job was half finished when he shouted that my can was boiled. I was really glad as it had been extremely warm inside the cistern. But then as I tried to come out head first I found I could not get out through the space. I tried doing it leg first but that was worse. At last I sat down. Willie came up the ladder and I was glad to see him but he said 'What are we going to do?'

I looked at him in astonishment. He was beginning to panic probably because if anybody found out I was in here it would not look right, I was only into my second year and should not have been undertaking such a job. I said 'Bring me up my can and my piece and I'll take my dinner. I'll cool down and the space'll get cooler as well, and then I'll try again.' That was what we done and sure enough, with me taking off my dungarees, eventually I managed to squeeze out through the 12 inch space onto the ladder.

While we were working at the State Bar we were sent to put in a water supply to the garden of Mr Don Grant, the boss of the firm. The State Bar was just one of many pubs owned by the Grant family, including the Rogano.[48] They also had the Royal licensed restaurant in West Nile Street, a famous gathering point for professional football players.

Mr Don Grant lived in an old style villa along the road from Victoria Hospital. It was a beautiful house, kept in good condition and seemed to be very exclusively furnished. They had a gardener who told us where to dig the track for the new water supply. We started to clear away the red chips and map the route. When I turned to use the pick-axe I saw a boy about five or six years of age, he was pulling the pick across the lawn. I shouted on him and he moved faster but the pick was too big for him to lift and he tripped and fell. I ran over and picked him up but he ran away into the house crying I had hit him. I lifted the pick and an angry lady came out of the house and said 'Did you hit the wee boy?' Just as I

[48] The Rogano is a famous Glasgow restaurant. Scott Savage writes: 'One Friday lunchtime Ted Heath, later a Prime Minister, entered with three colleagues and walked towards an empty table. Don Grant who used to wear 'plus fours', was present at the time and he yelled, 'Have you booked?' One of Ted's colleagues replied, 'D'you know who you're talking to! That 's Ted Heath!' 'I don't care who he is, if he hasn't booked he's not getting a table.' So Ted Heath and his party ended up in a wee corner at the bar with a plate of sandwiches.

was about to deny it the gardener came and told the lady what had happened, she turned and went back into the house We finished that job in record time and I was glad to get back to the State Bar.

Eventually my mate Willie Hunter and myself were split up. He went on to some other job and I was kept in the shop to run errands and help out wee Davie Neilson the jobbing plumber. Davie did all the maintenance and repairs in the tenements on the south side of the city. He was a very conscientious man and an Elder in his kirk. He had worked with the firm all his life, going back to the days when its founder, old John Irving, had started the business.

One of the first jobs we had to attend to was a choked drain in a backcourt in the Gorbals, at Florence Street. It was a typical choked drain in the backcourt with the whole close and some of the low-down houses awash with filthy water. We had to locate the draincover which was at least 8 inches under water. Davie told me to gather up some of the bricks that lay strewn about the place and make some stepping stones in through the water towards the grating. We did this and then Davie stepped his way towards the centre but just as he reached it the last brick slid away beneath his feet and he did a swan-dive right into the puddle. I ran into the water splashing through without using the bricks and helped Davie to his feet.

When he got up he took his dungaree jacket off. It was covered in shite. He just shrugged his shoulders and took the draincover off the grating, and using the drain-rods he cleared the water away. Then while one of the woman in the close was cleaning Davie's jacket and dungarees I washed the surface dirt away and brushed his back clean, and then we made our way back to the workshop. Waiting at the stop for the tramcar Davie said to me 'Are you sure I dont smell?'

'No.'

When we boarded the tram we went upstairs. We handed over our tuppence fares to the woman conductor. She looked at us and said 'I've heard of shite-bags but this is ridiculous, I should take yous two straight to Calder Street baths.'

We got off as soon as we could. Davie's main concern was the loss of his clay pipe which had been smashed when he fell in the water. It was a 'jaw-warmer'. He soon got himself a new one.

The next mishap we had was when we were repairing an underground waterpipe in a back court in Shawlands. It was a high

back with steps up from the close. And it was covered in grass. Where the route of the pipe was the digging was very soft and mainly sand. In no time at all we were down nearly three feet and our prodding to where the water was coming indicated that we still had a bit to go. Davie told me to get back to the workshop for a ladder and support boards.

I was away nearly forty five minutes because I had to bring it all on the barrow. When I got into the backcourt I could not see Davie. When I asked one of the women who lived up the close she said he had never left the back. I went across to the trench which by this time was over six feet in length. When I looked down the hole it was nearly five feet in depth and Davie was sitting there smoking his new clay pipe. I said 'What are you sitting down there for?'

'Well I just kept digging and then when I tried to get out the sides didn't seem secure so I waited till you came.'

We got the sides of the trench supported by our boards and completed the job then Davie treated me to one of his favourite things, a big London bun bought out of the City Bakeries, and then we made our way back to the workshop with the barrow.

The next day we got a job to renew a broken w.c. in a tenement in Pollokshaws Road Road. We never stocked sanitary-ware in the workshop so it was usually necessary for me to collect whatever it was from Smith & Holroyds at Bath Lane off Renfield Street.

Davie had to alter the pipework and get prepared for my return. I went round to the workshop to get an order and my tramcar fare. They only give me thruppence for this so it just took me to Argyle Street both ways. It had been my practice to walk down to Cook Street. This then allowed me get a tram to Argyle Street and walk empty handed up to Bath Lane. I was then left with tuppence and could get another tram outside the door of Smith & Holroyds right to Eglinton Toll.

In those days Renfield Street was one of the busiest streets in Glasgow and it was no joke balancing a w.c. on your shoulders as you squeezed through the crowds. Then too of course there was always the possibility that you could bump into some of the lassies that went to the dancing at the Calton Masonic. It would not have done any good for my image, at that time I was trying to kid on I was a fully-fledged plumber.

However, after all that, when I got into the workshop the next

morning Jessie the clerkess told me that Mr Jim Irving wanted to see me in the office. When I went into his room you could imagine my surprise when the first question he asked me was 'How much did you receive for your tram fare yesterday when you were going to Smith & Holroyds?'

'Thruppence.'

'And what were you doing walking into town?'

I tried to explain my reasons but it was obvious he did not believe me and thought I was cheating on the money. Then I said to him if I could see if I still had the tram tickets in my jacket pocket. And I went to where my jacket was hung up and lo and behold both the tickets, the one penny and the two penny, were still there. I took them into the office and showed them to him. Then I could see the real disappointment in his face. He gruffly told me to go back to my work. I began to think to myself what kind of man was it that wanted to humiliate a young apprentice.

A few weeks later I went into the workshop in the morning quite early and Davie was sitting puffing his pipe. It was part of his job that he opened the shop up in the morning. He seemed to be quite sad. I said, 'What's wrong Davie is your wife no well?'

'I'll tell you when we get to the job.'

As we were walking up to Pearson's hardware stores where we were working, he told me that Jim Irving had said he could no longer keep him working for the full week. If there was no work for him he would just have to go back home after he had opened up.

This more or less confirmed my belief that Mr Jim Irving was not a nice guy. How could Davie Nielson be treated in that manner, he had given his whole working life to the Irving family.

I told Davie to raise the issue with Sanny McIntyre who was the union man, in fact I think he was an official in the trade union lodge. But Davie was afraid to say anything. So without a word I went away myself and I told Sanny McIntyre the situation. Sanny went straight into the office and told the Irvings there would be no part-time plumbers working with this firm. Neither Sanny McIntyre nor myself ever mentioned it to anybody.

After a short spell in the workshop I was actually sent to the next job with Sanny. It was to fit a cocktail bar in the main stand adjacent to the directors' box at Ibrox Park. To more than half of all the boys in Glasgow this would have been a dream come true.

But I had always regarded myself as a Celtic supporter so my feelings were somewhat mixed. Nevertheless, when entering the empty stadium, the home of Glasgow Rangers, you could not be anything but impressed by the atmosphere.

It was much larger than I expected. The stand was built to provide space and the red terracotta brick gave it a strength to match its size. The main entrance was most impressive with its marble floor and columns, and its marble staircase with blue carpets to the fore. What took me by surprise was the friendly atmosphere. Everybody from the wee women who worked in the kitchen and the squad of cleaners who came into clean the whole stadium, right the way up to Mr Cameron the assistant coach, they were all genuinely obliging and helpful.

No one objected when me and Sanny took our tea-can and piece and sat on the steps of the stand watching the players train. Of course the highlight was the trial games they played at least once a week with the reserves playing the first team. It was no stroll either. All the players put their maximum effort into the game and when they left the field they were sweating heavily. I used to smile to myself and wonder what all the fanatic Rangers' supporters would say if they knew a 'tim'[49] was watching players like Davie Meiklejohn, Jerry Dawson, George Brown, Jimmy Simpson, Dougie Gray, Bob McPhail out training. All the above-named were automatic choices for any Scottish team, with Meikljohn regular captain.

The job took much longer than was envisaged and additional work cropped up. Many other tradesmen were working in the stadium. In those days we continued going till 12 noon on a Saturday. The second week there I was in the new cocktail bar with Sanny McIntyre when Mr Struth the manager approached and handed both of us an envelope. We did not know what it contained. When he held it out to me he said 'Now don't you be giving it away.'

As soon as he disappeared I hurriedly opened the envelope. It was a complimentary ticket for the stand for the match with Aberdeen that same afternoon.

Apparently this had been a practice for a long time and Mr Bill

[49] 'tim' = a Celtic supporter and/or Roman Catholic, derived from the rhyming slang, Tim Malloy = bhoy, an Irish spelling variant of boy.

Struth always carried it out himself. The joiner who was there working with us had done some work at Celtic Park and I asked him if this practice prevailed there too. He said to me 'Not on your life, I was there for over two months and not only did I not get a ticket but I never knew anyone who did.'

So for a 'tim' like me there were a few illusions dashed that Saturday morning when the great Rangers' manager handed me an envelope.

Mr Bill Struth was a genuine legend in his own time. He had never been a professional football player but he had been an athlete and the Rangers' Annual Sports Day was probably the most attractive athletic event in the entire sports' calendar. In those days there were no professionals in athletics but the quality of the prizes and the treatment of the participants ensured that most world-class athletes welcomed an invitation. I remember seeing the great Sidney Wooderson, slightly built with his straight hair parted in the middle and wearing glasses, leaving a world-class field in his wake as he smashed the mile record. The famous Finnish long-distance runner Pavvo Nurmi appeared at Ibrox Park and lapped the best in the world.

My most embarrassing experience at Ibrox was one weekday when taking material up to my mate working in the stand. A player – I think his name was Bobby Mains – asked me if I would close the door after he had put his car under the stand. I never gave it a thought and after closing it I ran up the stairs to the stand and virtually ran right into Mr Struth who was standing at the top of the steps. I apologised and made to pass him but he stopped me. 'Excuse me but who told you to close that door?'

'The driver.'

Mr Struth then said very firmly 'Your job here is to fit pipes, not to close doors, so go back to your work.'

As far as I remember he told the player off for bringing his car to Ibrox on a training day because it was an unwritten law that all players had to walk from the rail or bus stations. But he never stopped giving me a complimentary ticket for games so he did not seem to regard my mistake as too serious.

Most informed opinion on Glasgow Rangers regards Bill Struth, if not the best, as one of the best managers they ever had. As an apprentice plumber I can only say that all the players and staff at

Ibrox respected him. Maybe his demeanour guaranteed that. He was a fit man despite his greying hair, and he was always well-dressed in a comfortable way, with a well-cut suit and a soft brown hat. In those days Ibrox seemed a well-run club with a very capable staff and I was very sorry to leave that particular job.

Eventually I was sent to work on the 'Giffnock job'. This was a full, new estate of red sandstone houses being built by Thomas Stewart of Lochleven Road, Battlefield. Stewart had a good reputation as a builder and you could see why from the quality of work itself. While there were always at least two plumbers and an apprentice on the job, the plumber in charge sometimes worked by himself. His name was Wilson and he was really mean with materials, not popular at all with the rest of the plumbers. They regarded him as a real creep. The apprentices called him Rat Wilson.

But it was more experience for me and because I cycled to the job I could save the few coins I got for travelling expenses. There was another plumber on the job from Busby and a number of apprentice joiners and bricklayers so we always had a good game of football at dinnertime. The only fly in the ointment was Wilson, he kept asking me to go to the shop for material and bring it all the way out to Giffnock on the barrow.

One morning I had to go into the workshop first thing. Jim Irving saw me and passed on a note from Wilson who urgently required two bundles of lead pipe out at the new estate. Of course I had to take it on the barrow. I left at 8.30 am, taking as many side streets as possible to avoid the hills on the way up to Shawlands Cross. I thought I was making good time but by 10 o'clock I had only reached Merrylee. It is quite a pull up to Giffnock from there so I waited for a horse-drawn cart to come along to ask the carter if it would be alright if I hooked my barrow on. One did come. It was a laundry firm's cart, either Bowie's or Richmond Park. The carter was a young man and I remember him saying to me 'What kind of firm sends a wee boy like you out with a load like that?'

I got to the job about half past eleven and by the time I took the material off it was dinnertime. I did not play football that day. And despite the objections of Wilson I started with the barrow back to the shop about 2 o'clock. He was wanting me to take a whole load of scrap metal back to the workshop but I put as little as possible on the barrow.

Even although it was mostly downhill I did not get back to Victoria Road until 5 o'clock and at Shawlands Cross it had started to rain. I always left my bike at the workshop so I was soaking wet by the time I rode home at was nearly 6 pm.

I told my big brother Walter what had happened and he 'claimed' Wilson in the shop the next morning. He told him I was not to pull that barrow loaded on my own ever again. But it did not stop. Many a day I had to boil my can at the Statute of Labour tarpaulin road-howfs,6 leaving the barrow at the side of the road while I had my tea.

One morning when I was in the workshop Jim Irving told me Wilson would be off for a while because he was ill and I would have to run the job myself. I felt quite good about this even although, on reflection, it was ridiculous that a third-year apprentice plumber should be in charge of a full housing estate. I made a note of all the basic items that Wilson never ordered and went in the following morning with my list, which included rope-yarn for making joints on the connections for the wash-hand basins, sinks and w.c.'s.

Mr Irving listened when I told him about the plumbing materials listed above, then he told me I could get rope-yarn from the builders fitting the drains, and the glazier would give me all the putty I wanted, and as far as slate-nails went, the slater threw away more slate-nails than I would ever use, and I really did not need boss-white anyway because the oil-bound paint used by the painters is the best thing for fittings. In other words I was supposed to thieve the material off other tradesmen working on the site

It was all getting too much for me. As I cycled to the Giffnock job I made my mind up that I did not want to work for a guy like Mr Jim Irving, Elder in the church at Mount Florida, a pillar of society, while here he was depending on a third-year apprentice to steal for him so he could carry out his job contracts. It also occurred to me that not only did I despise the man but I felt superior to him.

When I went home that night I told my older brother Walter and I did not go into work on Saturday morning. Instead I went to the firm of R. S. Renfrew at North Street Lane, Charing Cross. I was seen by the foreman, a Mr Brown, who gave me a start for first thing on Monday. My brother told the clerkess in John Irving and Sons and picked up my cards. One point that convinced me that the firm of Renfrew's would suit me was the fact that they had a big

lorry instead of a hand-barrow to shift material out to jobs.

I was put to work on the roofs at Gourock railway station, renewing gutters and lead work. It was very heavy going but I found it interesting plus you got a great view of the ferry service to Dunoon and other places. The plumber in charge was called Peter, he came from Maryhill and was an ardent member of the Territorial Army.[50] There was another apprentice and plumber on the job. We got the 7 am train to Gourock every morning but you got your full expenses plus an hour each way travelling time. This made my wages up to over 25 shillings a week, compared to what I took home from Irving's which was not much more than 14 shillings. The weather was great as well, so in no time at all I was looking quite tanned.

R.S. Renfrew carried quite a number of large contracts and the original owner had been a baillie in the Glasgow Corporation. His son was now the boss and while he made regular visits to the job at Gourock he never spoke to anybody except Peter the foreman. One Friday when Peter gave me my wages he told me not to come on Saturday, instead I was to go into the shop at North Street lane because they were stocktaking. The Gourock job had lasted all summer and I did not manage to see any of the other plumbers and apprentices employed by my new firm. Now when I turned up at 8 am. I discovered that one of the final-year apprentices was Eddie Murphy. Eddie had been at Sacred Heart with me although I had never spoken to him. At school I was always a rebel and continually fighting in and out of the playground, whereas Eddie was a quiet boy. He was a year or so older than me and there was not much contact between us until now. He was very self conscious about his lack of hair and never took off his cap, even when the boys were larking about during stocktaking. I already knew about

[50] The Territorial Army is still based in Maryhill which has been a military centre, both territorial and 'regular', since 1873. 'The original Maryhill Barracks was built. . . to replace the old and unsuitable Gallowgate barracks [as] requested by the city magistrates because they were worried about possible riot and disorder amongst the large, and mostly immigrant, industrial labouring population.' (see *Old Maryhill* by Guthrie Hutton, publ. Richard Stenlake 1994). The 'regular' army left in 1958 and the barracks closed although the surrounding walls are in great shape. A new police station now stands across the road and reputedly is designed for a capacity of 2000 prisoners. . .'

his lack of hair because by this time I was going to the Barrowland Ballroom regularly and I saw him there. Eddie became quite a good ballroom dancer. The girls he danced with were alright, but considering that he was only a year or two older than me, what with his lack of hair and the mature dress they wore, him and his partner always seemed ancient.

Saturday mornings in the shop were good fun while we still got our work done. We always bought in bottles of ginger, Irn Bru and Tizer, and left some for Monday mornings till we found it was being guzzled by a plumber with the nickname 'Joe the Bull'. He was built like one and ate like one. His real name was Joe Bates and he came from Brigton. His sister worked alongside my mother and sister at Wilson's cotton mill in Marquis Street.

Wee Sanny, another of the apprentices, was getting so fed up with the disappearing ginger that he put a double-strength laxative into the bottles and gave them a good shake, then left them in the usual place. It came Monday morning and as usual Joe the Bull emptied both bottles then left the workshop. Him and his apprentice were making their way to a job out in Bishopbriggs. The apprentice told us about it later. For the rest of that day Joe kept going to the toilet wondering what was causing the problem because 'I'm never like this I'm always regular.' On the bus going home his apprentice said to him 'Take my advice Joe, never drink people's leavings.' From that day on neither Joe nor any of the rest of the journeymen ever touched the apprentices' ginger.

Most of the plumbers were okay, they were all good tradesmen and could tackle any aspect of the trade, and most of them were in the union. But there was one plumber who stood out and even the boss was deferential to him. This was Willie Dick, an outstanding lead burner and copper brazer. Willie could plan the largest job with meticulous care. He was not a young man but never seemed to panic. When he spoke he did not like to waste his breath and was listened to with respect. He always wore dungarees and never tried to boss anybody. He was my next mate when we started the plumbing in the new school being built out in Clydebank.

It was at the top of Kilbowie Road, a brand new secondary school, and the builders were McDougals from Daavar Street, Brigton, next to Celtic Park. The site looked down on the famous, or infamous, housing scheme nicknamed The Holy City. This

scheme was built by the present Lord McAlpine's forefathers9 back in the 1920s and was not regarded as a model for house design. It had a completely new method of construction with large concrete blocks built in sections, like a Meccano set. These buildings were to become coffins when Hitler's bombers visited Clydebank for two nights during the 2nd World War.

The job was the largest I had ever worked on and there did not seem to be any trouble. Willie Dick knew exactly what work the four or five plumbers and two apprentices had to do from day to day. I got to experience nearly every branch of the plumbing trade. Willie only showed you once, then he let you get on with it. I tried lead burning and even had a shot at brazing. And he usually asked me to help him when he was doing something complicated, so he could test me.

Apart from my progress in the work itself I met one of the best characters on the job. This was Mick who was in charge of the panmill cement-mixer for the builders. Mick was as strong as a horse and he had the fat to go with it. He was always pulling my leg and playing tricks on me but it was done in good spirit. I worked with Mick's father too. He was the main drainer on the job and he had to connect up to our pipework or vice versa. Unlike his son he was very quiet and also a devout Catholic. He was always giving Mick a row for using bad language and he would warn me not to be led astray by him.

They both stayed in Cedar Street, just next to the Round Toll. Mick organised events in the street and one time he invited me on a bus-run to Portobello. I asked along my pal Jimmy Brown and we made our way to the bus on Saturday morning at 10 o'clock. There were two buses and both were full, each had its crate of booze. But I was quite embarrassed with the crowd that was there. Mick had told me there was loads of birds going and they were all stoaters. And I had told Jimmy Brown that. Now I could see Jimmy's face fall. All the men and woman were older than us and there were plenty of weans. We felt over-dressed with our drape suits and suede shoes, although we made the best of it. Mick kidded the life out of me.

We were only halfway to Portobello when the driver in the front bus stopped to let his passengers relieve themselves, so both of the buses pulled into the small parking space on the old Edinburgh Road. The men peed against the bus in the inside away from the road and the women went through a small break in the hedges at the side of the road. Me and Jimmy Brown never left the bus and lo and behold did the best-looking girl on the bus not relieve herself just facing us. In our elevated position we could see much more than her bare bottom. Jimmy took a new lease of life and put on his best and first smile of the day.

When we got to Portobello it was surprising to find that the buffet we sat down to was in the cafeteria of the new swimming pool. It was very pleasant but I regretted not bringing my trunks. Plenty of girls were there and apart from the noise of the weans all the Cedar Street crowd were really enjoying themselves, and not one fight in progress. Jimmy was talking ten-to-the-dozen with the Cedar Street Marlyn Monroe, or was it Lana Turner in those days. The meal was also good. Mick was there with us and I told him it was turning out alright after all. He said to me 'Fine, but tell your pal to keep his eyes off my bird.'

On the way back to Glasgow after a nice day we managed to get a seat right behind the girl with the nice bottom and her pal but I saw Mick was wagging his finger at us and then a wee bit later I began to feel my seude shoes were wet and I looked down to find the whole floor was awash with pish, so that put the damper on any romantic bliss me and Jimmy might have felt.

general industrial view

Avoidable Accidents and the Big World Outside

I WAS on the Clydebank High School job all that summer but then one day the boss brought me into the workshop at North Street Lane to prepare for an office development in Glasgow. I was cutting sheet-lead outside in the yard when a new load of sheet-lead rolls was delivered. It came on the horse-drawn cart belonging to the lead manufacturer, Stevenson. The usual old carter was in charge of the Clydesdale, his pride and joy.

Each roll of lead weighed one ton and there was no crane nor mechanical means to unload them. The method we used was to roll the lead to one side of the lorry then onto two ropes which were attached to two hooks on the other side. The lead rolls were then eased on to the skids which went from one side of the lorry down onto the ground. I was holding a small two-wheeled barrow, which we called a 'jeanie', between the two skids as the carter eased the ropes. One of the plumbers giving us a hand with the unloading noticed that the ropes were frayed and he drew attention to it. The old carter said 'Safe as the bank, I've taken off tons with these ropes.'

The plumber said 'Aye but is that not the problem?'

Now the lead was eased onto the skids and I had taken my place holding the jeanie at the appropriate height to meet the lead. The rope had just began to take the strain when it snapped and the ton of lead lunged towards me. I put my hand on the ground to throw myself away and the roll of lead trapped it. I saw the blood and knew my hand was badly damaged. The big plumber made a dive towards the carter. 'You stupid old bastard you've crippled that boy for life.'

The amazing thing was that due to the fact that there was a dent on the roll of lead precisely where it hit the ground only the pinkie finger on my right hand was trapped. The foreman and another man lifted one end of the roll of lead and I managed to get my hand free. The boss, Mr Renfrew, came out and after remonstrating with the old carter who did not seem much concerned, he gave Tam the lorry driver the keys of his car and told him to drive me to the Western Infirmary.

When we got there the feeling was beginning to come back into my finger and it was quite sore. Tam did not make things better when he said to me 'No doubt about it son they'll have to take your finger off.'

But I was quite determined there was no way that would happen, even if the finger was badly damaged, come what may it would remain joined to my hand. The surgeon seemed to agree. The small bone was broken and protruding through the skin but he told me they could reset it and stitch the wound up, put a small splint on it. I could come back in three weeks and they would see how it was. He also told me my finger would never truly straighten or get back to normal. But I did not care, just as long as my finger was saved.

After that I was taken into the office by the boss and got put to work on some menial tasks, things I could do with my arm in a sling. In the office a framed plaque took up a prominent place on the wall and it consisted of about fifteen names of employees that had died in the 1914-1918 War. I also discovered that Mr Renfrew junior was a reserve captain in the Territorials. At the same time the boss kept asking about my age and he had the habit of saying 'It will not be long now till you get called up.' I had always been too busy with my after-work pursuits to pay much attention to what was happening in the outside world. The only papers I read were the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Citizen*, and even then it was only the sport pages. Now I faced this new fact, that what was happening in the outside world might affect me personally. Probably for the first time I had to think about serious issues.

I went about the menial work of running errands and so on but I missed my real work. Even although I was getting my wages it was not the same as being on the job with your mates, also I missed the feeling that you were achieving something by helping to build things.

One point I should make, there was never the slightest hint made to me about compensation for an industrial injury. Most of the plumbers were in the union but nobody volunteered information, nobody suggested that I was entitled to anything.

After three or four weeks I got all the dressing of my hand and was hoping to go back to the Clydebank High School job, but it was not to be, so I never saw my pal big Mick and old Pat his dad, to say cheerio. I later heard Mick went back to his job as a lorry driver

and then one time I met him in Helensburgh, unloading goods in a housing scheme. I was sorry when he told me old Pat had died. The two of them were the salt of the earth.

The boss put me to work on a contract job at Evanton Airport north of Inverness. My mother was very worried as I had never been away from home. But I was looking forward to it, it was a new adventure. The guy in charge, George McCormack, was one of the best plumbers I ever worked with. He did most of what we called 'the country jobs'. The two of us caught the Inverness train from the old Buchanan Street Station and travelled for nearly six hours. We got a good lunch on the train which George paid for. At Inverness we changed trains for one taking us on to Evanton, beyond Dingwall. We did not arrive till mid afternoon and were told we would get digs in a small scheme on the outside of the village, not far from the airport.

The landlady was Mrs Corbett, she was quite a nice woman, not as old as her husband who I think was a farm labourer, a friendly old guy. She was a great cook and baker and her house while plain was very clean. I had a small room of my own next to the bathroom for which I was glad. The Corbetts had a Collie dog which in next to no time became my pal. After we had a cup of tea that first afternoon it was decided to visit the site and see the general foreman.

The airport was a base for the RAF and our job was to carry out the plumbing on several houses for the officer staff, including the commandant of the air base. It was a marvellous site, looking right out to the Cromarty Firth. The place was abound with wild life and apparently most of the many streams had good fishing for salmon.

The first week or so we were busy taking delivery of material and carrying out all the outside work, fitting waste-pipes, connecting up to the drains. We fitted the gutters on the houses that stood ready, the lead around the chimneys, preparing the way for the slaters. When we got time to look around the air base we found it large, with a hundred or more personnel, and planes always coming and going.

The job was quite interesting and the local workers were a good squad, very obliging. During the week the days went quickly, it was the week-ends dragged a bit. If you were not working the only pastime was long walks, so I discovered all the beauty spots in and around Evanton.

Soon after we had managed to get ahead with the work big George started going away on Friday afternoons, staying over with somebody in Carrbridge, and I was left on my own.

We usually got our wages at the local post office in Evanton but occasionally the boss came up by car to bring some items of material and he brought the wages along with him. I was getting subsistence allowance for working away from home and Mrs Corbett did not take the full money off me, and on top of that I was getting a lot of overtime. For the first time in my working life I felt quite prosperous. I began sending my mother extra money home. But she sent me a swift return letter, ordering me to spend what money I had on buying new clothes. So on the next Saturday afternoon train I went straight into Inverness and spent the whole afternoon shopping. Then I bought myself a fish-tea, and went on to the Caledonia Hotel for the dancing. I had become quite reasonable at it due to my joiner pal so it was no problem getting girls to dance with me. I thought there would be a difficulty understanding the Highland accent but to my surprise that did not happen. I found out it was common knowledge that the people of Inverness spoke the best English in Britain.

Another plumber sent up from Glasgow was Alex McConnell who came from Ayrshire. He was a good guy and a good tradesman and during the dinnertime kickabout we soon discovered how good at football he was. In fact he played for a Junior team.[51] One of the big joiners was quite good as well and not only played for Muir of Ord Rovers he was the club secretary. He kept on at Alex to turn out for them till he finally agreed. He played with them a couple of times and was doing quite well. One Saturday they were playing a team from the Seaforth regiment at Fort George barracks. I was going into Inverness so Alex asked me to come along and support them. When we got off the Muir of Ord team bus and went into the dressing room in the barracks the big joiner discovered they were a man short and he asked me to play. I was wary but Alex told me not to worry, he would look after me.

The football-strip was so big I had to use my trouser-belt to

[51] Players in Junior football are paid expenses and a nominal sum. Attendances for the larger Junior teams can be more than those in the lower reaches of the Senior leagues; it is a semi-professional operation, popular in many parts of the country, especially the central belt.

hold up the shorts. What a massacre it was, we got beat by six goals, it could have been twenty six. The Seaforths kicked us off the park and Alex, the best player, was put up in the air every time he went near the ball. All in though it was good. The regiment laid on a very nice high-tea for the Muir of Ord Rovers team and officials. We left Fort George bruised and battered, but happy.

One of the slaters on the job came from Glasgow. He had a big Norton motorbike and went home on alternate week-ends. I asked him if he would give me a lift and I would share the petrol. He was quite glad to do so. I asked George if it would be alright if I left on Friday at dinnertime. I had been on the job two months without being home and as the work now neared completion he gladly gave permission. We left Evanton at 12 noon and by going straight down the old A82 road we were in Glasgow at 6.30 pm. The slater dropped me right at my close, he lived in Sunnybank Street so it did not take him much out of his way.

After a home-cooked meal from my mother and a good wash I went up to Garngad and picked up my pal Jimmy Brown. We arrived at the Barrowland Ballroom about 8 30 pm. I felt great, wearing the new sports jacket I had bought out a good quality shop in Inverness, and on the Saturday and Sunday I was back out socialising again. When I hopped onto the pillion of the big Norton at 5 o'clock on Monday morning the road back up to Evanton flew by. I managed to get one more weekend home before the job finished.

George McCormack's absences were becoming more frequent and I had to cover up for him whenever the boss phoned, but soon it did not matter. Alex McConnell returned home first and then a few weeks later George and myself followed.

When I started back in the Glasgow workshop a few things happened that made me think about my future. Mr Renfrew kept on asking me if I had got my call-up papers and not to worry because it would not be long till I did. It was beginning to get me down. I also started reading more about what was happening in the world. I was not clear about the role of the Tory government and its attitude towards Germany. Neither was I clear about its failure to support the Spanish people and their government, when they had been attacked by Franco and the Fascists of Italy and Germany. I was beginning to question what I read in the newspapers. Around this time an old plumber we called 'Chummy' got paid off. I cannot

remember his real name but a more decent man you could not work with. He may have reached retirement age, I cannot remember. But I could not understand the decision because I knew the firm had plenty of work on. The old guy lived out in Milngavie and I gave him a hand to carry his kit of tools up the road to the bus-stop. He was practically in tears. It seemed to me that there must be something wrong with any set-up that allowed people like old Chummy to be treated in such a way.

Then a couple of days later Eddie Murphy told me that his time was out, he was now a journeyman, but Mr Renfrew had told him he would need to work another year as an 'improver'. This was just so the firm could avoid paying him the proper rate for the job. So that was Eddie, he said he was leaving. On top of what else had happened in the last few weeks I decided to leave with him, and the two of us left that Friday even although I had still not completed my own apprenticeship.

First thing Monday morning we were down Brigton Labour Exchange and were given 'green-cards' for the firm of Laidlaw's. We started on a building site at Glen Mavis, north of Coatbridge, working on prefabricated houses. Our job was to complete the plumbing. It was not a bad job although the organisation left a lot to be desired, we were always running out of material. It was just a small housing scheme, with the first 'prefabs' ever built in that area. We got our travelling expenses and were put on the full pumbers' rate which was three times what I had got at Renfrew's. But the job ended three months later and the foreman paid us off, and told us it would be few weeks before another site was ready. We had no intention of hanging around, we went back to the broo. Immediately we were given two green-cards for John Brown's shipyard, told to go there at 8 o'clock on Monday morning and be prepared to start straightaway. We were a bit apprehensive but my apprenticeship was now finished and I was a time-served plumber, so that was that. On the following Monday in May 1939 Eddie and myself caught the 7 am train from Bridgeton Cross Station to Clydebank. Little did I know that this change in employment would radically change my whole attitude to life itself.

Part 3

Work and Education, Activism

I REMEMBER it was a fresh morning in late spring when Eddie and myself stepped through the doors of John Brown's. We had never been inside a shipyard in our lives yet here we were employed as ships' plumbers. It was quite a daunting experience, even alighting from the train at Clydebank Station, we were amazed to see the mass stampede to John Brown's gate. Apparently if you did not get through before 8 am they closed it and you could not get admission until 12 noon. There were no allowances. A minute late and it cost you four hours' wages. Later on they set up a Yard Committee under the EWO (Essential Working Orders), and if you were a habitual latecomer or an absentee without a reasonable excuse, it could lead to an appearance at the Sheriff Court and even some form of imprisonment.

After we were interviewed by Mr Barnes, the plumbers' foreman, we were allocated a job on *The Vanguard*, alongside an experienced ship's plumber. Another shock awaited us, a Shop Steward approached and asked us for our union card. We had come from a building site and had never been asked for a union card at any time before so it was a new experience. However, neither of us objected to being a member. We were told that the Glasgow East Lodge of the Plumbing Trades Union (PTU) met every Monday night in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) rooms in London Road. We duly went along and joined that evening. For the first time in my life I was a trade unionist.

First impressions of the shipyard were the noise, the dust and the fumes. The plumber we worked alongside was called Willie Fernie, quite an old man who travelled in from Rutherglen every day. He took me under his wing. It was all completely different from the building trade. Our job was to link up pipes running between decks and fit deck-blocks that came made-up from the plumbers' shop. We fitted them after the hole-borers had done their work. Old Willie was a great character and I really enjoyed working with him. He carried his wee quarter bottle of whisky every day

and could tell of the old days when he went dancing at a hall in Bridgeton which later became Tobago Street police station.

There was no canteen in those days, only hot water was provided. At dinnertime me and Eddie boiled our cans at the bending-fires and we sat and ate our piece in the plumbers' shop.

One thing that struck me was not only the vast number of men employed in John Brown's but the wide and varied trades in the yard. There were plumbers, electricians, coppersmiths, sheet-metal workers, french-polishers, then there were riveters, holder-ons, hole-borers, rivet-heaters and catchers, and joiners, platers, shipwrights, welders, painters, red-leaders, laggers and pipe-coverers, caukers, riggers, and cranedrivers. In all my time in the yard I do not recall one demarcation dispute. There was a multitude of sweeper-ups as well. Then too you had the white-collar staff, office-workers, draughtsmen and the tally-men who counted the work done by the piece-workers. Finally there were the private detectives who patrolled the yard and the ships under construction, making sure you did not steal anything. Not only that, the private detectives could fine you 2/6d for drinking tea between hours, they could even kick over your full tea-can if they wanted.

So it was into this industrial jungle as a young greenhorn plumber that I found myself. Yet strangely enough I discovered it was not a hostile atmosphere at all. The main trait you had to acquire was the ability to wait. At most stages of your work as a plumber it became necessary to get a hole-borer to allow you to take a pipe through a deck or a bulkhead. On other occasions it could be a welder or a sheet-metal worker you needed. As you were only one of several hundred plumbers on the ship you had to learn to be patient. When you had completed your part of a particular job, again you had to wait until your gaffer gave you another job, so a great part of your time was spent on waiting.

Another aspect of shipbuilding that intrigued me was the management-structure. You had your immediate gaffer who was answerable to the foreman and he in turn was responsible to the plumbing-manager. It went from him to the ship's manager who was in charge of the whole ship. He in turn was responsible to the yard manager who in those days was the famous Donald Skivington, a legend in his time. Above him was Sir Stephen Piggot, the managing director. The final supremo was Lord Abercormbie himself, he owned John Brown's, lock, stock and barrel.

Yet despite all the super structure, to a novice like me it seemed antediluvian beyond belief. There was no provision of any nature to have your dinner.[52] In the summer you boiled your can and sat somewhere in the open, eating your piece. In the winter you went into the platers' shed or the plumbers' shop which was quite warm due to the fires used for bending big pipes. If you could afford it you used some of the restaurants in Clydebank that served a reasonable cheap lunch.

The most important thing, and it really shocked me, was the fact that there seemed a complete disregard for safety. Everyday, summer and winter, when the ships were on the stocks or in the fitting-out basins, large plate-sections were being lifted aboard by huge cranes, right over the heads of dozens of workers. These cranes lifted thousands of tons of equipment aboard. Yet there seemed to be nobody responsible for safety. Every solitary day there were accidents. It was a miracle that most of them were minor. There was only one person handling accidents, a nurse, operating from a small ambulance room. This in a yard that employed approximately 10,000 people. To me it was an obscenity.

The infamous John Brown's toilets came as another shock. They were beyond belief. Many people have written about them before but you really had to experience it for yourself. These tiny wee cubicles, so wee that your knees were jammed against the door, even if you were quite small. You sat on a wooden board that overhung a metal trough and you had to do your business into the water along with forty or so other workers. The shout 'Timberrr!' went up everytime the trough was flushed by the attendant and you risked getting soaked by a cascade of water, pish and shite.

You had to give the attendant your metal-check with your department number when you went in. You were allowed seven minutes. If you went over that by the slightest margin you were docked half an hour. But I would have been looking for the Victoria Cross medal if I had stayed in one of them for longer than seven minutes.

[52] 'Churchill had to write to John Brown's to try to persuade them to open a canteen for their workers. See 'Clyde Apprentices' Strikes' by Sandy Hobbs, in the anthology *Workers' City*, edited by Farquhar McLay (Clydeside Press 1988).

In all the years I worked in Brown's I managed to use their carsies very seldom indeed. The real abomination was the rows of metal spikes fitted along the back of the trough, this was just so nobody could lean or rest against the partition. It was maybe the first time I became aware that we definitely live in a class-divided society. The fine Victorian, Christian industrialist who designed them really must have hated the working class.

However, the new breed of workers coming into Brown's shipyard were not the same as the employees of the past and they were unwilling just to accept things. The carsies became a target for many workers. They devised methods to make them a menace, eventually to make them unusuable.They were desperate to get them closed down and force the management to instal a more modern type, ones that would allow some privacy as well.

One thing they did was put together small boats made out of seagull feathers and when the troughs were flushed they launched them. Many an unsuspecting worker got the fright of his life when he felt a feather caressing his bum. Some of the more daring apprentices started to use oily waste and as the attendant flushed the troughs they threw a lighted bit into them and then got off their mark. While it no doubt gave some of the older men a warm glow the only real hurt they received was to their dignity. But it worked, soon nobody would use the toilets at all and at long last the Shop Stewards were successful in getting new ones installed.

After a few days being bewildered by all this strangeness we became very conscious of the fact that we were locked in. You could not get out without a pass from the foreman for which time was docked from your wage. As a building-trade plumber I was used to the freedom to go off the site to a shop at dinnertime, or even just go out for a walk, so this confinement was a particularly bitter pill to swallow. But it was also around these early days that I heard my first street meeting. The speaker was putting a case for the anti-Fascist fight, he spoke on behalf of the Communist Party. I was not particularly interested, my own concerns lay elsewhere, mainly in dancing and buying clothes from the Co-operative.

Things changed for me when I was transferred to Pollock's engineers' shop as a dilution engineer, it was here my political education began to develop. During the war the employers had introduced dilution of labour. It meant that all tradesmen, no matter

your qualifications, could be put to another trade. They were fitting air-lines to the machinery which was in abundance aboard the modern warships and I was put on the gun-turret squad under a nice chap called Tommy McGee. There was only six of us and our job was to face deck-blocks by hand to a very accurate degree. It was quite boring but the lads were cheery and the days passed quickly.

Because he knew I was a Celtic supporter Tommy confided in me. He was a devout Catholic which was a great surprise, that because he was a gaffer at all. It was common knowledge that the path to a supervisory position lay through the Masonic Lodge. Yet here was Tommy McGee. He felt we had a lot in common through religion and invited me up to his house in Yoker one night for my tea. I went and I met his wife, they had only been married a few months and their wee house was spotless. To crown it all she was a great baker and I was always a sucker for home-baking.

Unfortunately for Tommy, by this time I was already starting to read some of the Socialist pamphlets that were being circulated in the department. Before going to work at John Brown's I had no knowledge of politics and hardly any knowledge of the world at all outside my immediate environment. In fact I was still a practising Catholic and I was considered quite devout. My family seemed to have too much to do without looking beyond. While I was a prolific reader there were never any really serious books in the house, it was either 'true romances' or westerns. Very seldom did anybody ever buy a newspaper except my father who studied the *Noon Record* for hours, and occasionally my mother bought the *Weekly News*. Although my father was of Irish stock I never ever heard him make any political points of view.

Now I began to realise how politically ignorant I was. Most of the apprentices in the department were political and many were in the Young Communist League (YCL), and I was enjoying their paper *Challenge*. Also I had begun reading the *Free Thinker* which was readily available inside John Brown's.These were points of vew I never knew existed and it was beginning to throw doubts on my Catholic upbringing, much to the annoyance of Tommy McGee. For the first time I realised there was more to life than sport, dancing and wearing good clothes. I saw a new role that workers should play.

In John Brown's the 'black-squads' – the riveters, platers, rackers, hole-borers or welders – all were employed to a piece-work rate and counters measured their output. But there was no production bonus operating in departments like the engineers or plumbers. So although you always had to look busy time was not that important. I began watching the activities of the Young Communist League (YCL) and the Communist Party who dominated political discussion and led the struggle for better conditions in all departments. The steps I took were faltering but were based on the attitude I had grown to admire among the leading Communists.

I became friendly and supportive of the YCL members in my own department. This despite Tommy McGee who was always telling me that as a Catholic I had nothing in common with the Communists. But I could see for myself the growing battles they were putting up against the management's attempts to use the war as an excuse not to pay better wages. Meanwhile their contracts were based on the notorious 'cost plus 20%'. It was a licence to print money. All their obsolete machinery and equipment were being renewed as quickly as possible and money was no object. Yet some last-year apprentices were lucky to get a wage of £1/10/- a week. Trouble was definitely looming.

The political scene in John Brown's was a million miles away from any of my previous experiences. As I said, before coming to work there my knowledge of politics could have been put on the back of a postage stamp. I do remember seeing Jimmy Maxton[53]

[53] James Maxton (1885-1946) ILP MP for Bridgeton from 1922 until his death; 'converted to socialism by John Maclean, who introduced him to the writings of Blatchford and Karl Marx. . . [p117] When the Labour Party won the General Election of 1945 so decisively, the leaders of the ILP felt that that was the organisation they should be in. The question of re-affiliation arose. . . and Maxton was willing to merge the two parties but hesitated to make a move. . . [but after] he died on 26th June 1946, there was a scramble out of the ILP into the Labour Party.' [see p242 of *Come Dungeons Dark; the life and times of Guy Aldred, Glasgow Anarchist* J.T.Caldwell; Luath Press 1988). In *No Mean Fighter* by Joan Smith and Harry McShane (Pluto Press 1975) McShane tells us that 'the unscrupulous' John McGovern 'became dominant' but Maxton continued to be the figurehead [which] left the ILP in a very difficult position. It had been formed to get Labour represented in parliament and had always worked in the Labour Party; the split took away its foundations. The members were torn in all directions. In Scotland McGovern came on NUWM marches, but in England the ILP couldn't be seen to be identified with the Communist Party. They had to find an existence as a separate party. They even formed their own unemployed organisation, which had a few branches in England but got nowhere in Scotland. The more right wing members finished with the ILP, and the rump moved to the left. They made revolutionary statements, and even applied to the Communist International for affiliation.' [p198] But there remained 'enmity' between the ILP and the CPGB 'particularly over the former's support of the POUM in the Spanish conflict and its condemnation of the Moscow show-trials of the mid-1930s.' [Knox 208]

speaking in the Booly to over a thousand people and I know my father voted for him. I can also recall his Unionist opponent, McCracken.[54] The ILP used to sing:

> Vote vote vote for Jimmy Maxton
> vote vote vote for all his men
> then we'll buy a tommy gun
> and we'll make McCracken run

Instead of counting Maxton's votes they use to weigh them. I think it is true to say that the Catholics voted for him but the bulk of the Protestants must have voted for him as well to gain the high majority he enjoyed, until his death in 1946.

While I had been brought up in ILP territory there did not seem to be any real activity between elections. What action there was was at a local level and some of the ILP and Labour Party councillors did not speak the same language as the people on the streets. Then too of course there were the housing bribery scandals of the 1930s which resulted in a few councillors being jailed, so that did nothing to enhance the role of of the working class political parties of the time. But it should be said that one of the most successful touring-cycle clubs around at that time was *The Socialist Cycle Club* and it was mainly the ILP that ran it. On a good day there would be at least eighty girls and boys on bicycles leaving from Brigton Cross.

[54] McCracken, a Unionist, any info

But now for the first time in my life I was grappling with books on philosophy and economics. I was a Catholic who was interested in the materialist conception of history and ultimately, after reading Darwin and Ingersoll's lectures, and Brother Joseph McCabe's *Twelve Years in a Monastery,* I was looking at an atheist explanation of society. My new way of thinking was not a real problem as far as my family was concerned, I had really been the only practicing Catholic in the house and my father was dead by this time.

One day I was helping in handing out Communist leaflets outside the engineering shop and I gave one to a good-looking, dark curly-haired boy that I had never seen before. When I asked him to buy a *Daily Worker* he just laughed and walked past me. One of the other apprentices told me his name was Johnnie Moore. He was the outstanding apprentices' leader in John Brown's and was on the National Committee of the YCL. He was also Secretary of the Clyde Apprentices Committee who were leading the campaign to improve apprentices' wages and conditions, which had remained stagnant for years. Johnnie Moore had an easy-going attitude and was quite unassuming.[55]

Another of my fellow workers was a plumber from Helensburgh called Alistair McKillop.[56] He was a smashing football player, a centre-forward. He was tall and fast and had a great shot with either foot. He played for a junior team from Rhu. We were both attached to the gun-squad and became good friends. He soon became famous by signing for Rangers but he was never big-headed. Like myself he was attracted by what the Young Communists were saying and how they were trying to defend against a really authoritarian management team led by Lord Abercrombie, Sir Stephen Piggot and, last but not least, the general manager, Donald Skivington.

I eventually joined the Communist Party several months after starting work at John Brown's and I became very enthusiastic about it. I was surprised to find out the workers who were Party members and the extent of their support. I discovered that every department in the yard had a group of members and a representative on the executive. Most of the Shop Stewards were either members or supporters of the Party. It is not surprising that should have been the case when you examine the calibre of the Shop Stewards, they were some of the most talented in the Trade Union Movement. And the Shop Stewards' Convenor was Bob McLennan who was employed as a dilution electrician. Bob had been to the Lenin school in Moscow and was on the Scottish Committee of the Party. I always found him very approachable, never aloof and never dictatorial, he was a modest man and very intelligent.

Bob McLennan had a long record of activity in the working class movement and when I got to know Harry McShane later he always spoke highly of him. He told me how Bob had played a leading role in the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM[57]) and took part on all the Hunger Marches. Bob was a

[55] In a late letter to Hugh, Johnnie Moore wrote: 'It is 46 years since I first met you standing at the engineering store window and you had the audacity to hand me a *Daily Worker*, not realising that I was a wee high heid yin of the Young Communist League. Then you invited me to meet Jim McLaren and you in the Pop In pub in Glasgow. . . I thought you were just another dilettante.

[56] Later on McKillop moved to Morton and the last Hughie heard he had emigrated to South Africa. Scott Savage writes that his father's big pal Alistair McKillop played for Rangers when Bill Struth was the manager. They used to go to the Albert Ballroom in Bath Street. Willie Waddell used to ask if he could come along with them. So later they got talking about wages, etc. and Alistair found out what [Waddell] was getting as captain of Rangers, an international player. He told Willie he was getting ripped-off, You should be getting a lot more. So a few days later as Alister was leaving training and going through the main foyer at Ibrox, Struth was standing at the half landing. 'Hey McKillop can I have a word with you!' So he goes into Struth's office. 'Well Alister, you might be the best dressed, best read, best looking guy at Ibrox but you certainly aren't the best player. I've just had Willie Waddell in here asking for a raise. He says he was at the dancing with you on Saturday night and you were telling him. . . bla bla blah. . . In future McKillop you keep your opinions to yourself.

[57] The history of the NUWM in Scotland is inextricably linked with the social, political and economic ssues that affected the working class throughout the second quarter of the twentieth century. The organisation was formed out of the demobilised sailors' and soldiers' associations of 1918. It campaigned on a bewildering array of issues; supporting the struggles of the employed against wage cuts, speed-ups and underemployment; it was active in rent strikes, campaigns against eviction, task work and labour camps, the transference of labour, and

member of the ETU (Electricians Trade Union). After he left John Brown's he became Assistant General Secretary at national level, until later still he was expelled during the ballot-rigging exposure of the 1960s. Bob McLennan was the best Shop Steward I ever met and I really liked him.[58] TUC President Vic Feather was prepared to use the informal channels of Common Cause and ???

At John Brown's he was ably assisted by Davie Burke who recruited me into the Party. Davie was one of the best-read guys I knew and as well as being on the the Scottish Committee of the CP

discrimination against women workers; it agitated against the means test; defended the Spanish Republic; opposed intervention in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s; fought for peace in the 1930s. From its inception the basis of support for the NUWM lay within working-class communities and its history epitomises the concept of independent working class-action enshrined in the words of the Internationale. . . see George Rawlinson's 'Mobilising the Unemployed: The National Unemployed Workers' Movement in the West of Scotland', included in *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde 1900-1950; Essays in Honour of Harry McShane (1891-1988)* edited by Robert Duncan and Arthur McIvor (John Donald, 1992).

[58] There were large numbers of blacklisted workers following the tumultuous war years on Clydeside. Even before that numbers of workers had been blacklisted in the wake of the great Clydebank Singer strike of 1911. Industrial Research and Information Services to reach into union branches [and] played a crucial role in unseating the communists from the Electrical Trades Union [ETU] which climaxed with the famous 1961 court case over ballot rigging. His role was to sustain the leader of the anti-communist campaign, Les Cannon. One of Feather's associates outside the Labour Movement was David James. . . a director of Common Cause. James agreed to help and arranged for a group of Catholic businessmen to pay Cannon a weekly subsistence allowance. . .
In the decade following World War Two. . . the international anti-communist scare was. . . enthusiastically adopted by the TUC and applied at home. On the TUC General Council of 1954. . . there was not a single member who could be called a socialist. There were, however, two members of Common Cause's Advisory Council, Tom O'Brien and Florence Hancock. . . both past TUC presidents. See 'In a Common Cause: the Anti-Communist Crusade in Britain 1945-60' by Stephen Dorril and Robin Ramsay. *Lobster Magazine 19.*

he was Shop Steward in the electrical department. He was quite a good speaker and always easy-going, instantly recognisable with his glasses and pipe. He went on to be the National President of the Tobacco Workers Union when he left the shipyards. Then there was Arnold Henderson, recruited into the Party by Bob McLennan. Arnold served on the Clydebank District Council as a Communist Party member for a number of years after the war.[59] The plumbers' Shop Steward was Joe Brown of the YCL who later became regional officer of the Plumbers Trade Union.

One of the outstanding theoreticians in the Party at that time was Hamish Fraser who worked in the foundry, the dirtiest job in the yard. When I used to call on him you could hardly see him for soot and dust. Yet behind that dirty exterior Hamish spoke the flawless English that could have belonged to any teacher of the language. Hamish was well thought of in the yard but as far as playing any part in the activity, he only took his allocation of Party literature and did not get involved. I found that disappointing because in the course of time, as well as being put in charge of literature and propaganda I had the dinnertime gate-meetings, which were run by the CP, and a speaker of the calibre of Hamish Fraser would have been a real asset. But despite repeated approachs I could never get him to speak at any of our regular meetings. We held them outside Brown's engine-shop gate nearly every day. I heard many years later that Hamish was living in Ayrshire and was writing and speaking for the Catholic church.

In the sheet metal department there was a strong group led by Charlie Gormley, a hard working Shop Steward and Party member. His son is known for his involvment in Scottish film-making. And a mention must be made of Ian Clark who worked with me in the yard as a plumber. Although he had joined the Party Ian was not very active in the yard but after the war he got totally involved in

[59] p60 Arnold Henderson was 'a Communist but his brother, H.W., was editor of Common Cause magazine. In Glasgow 'the Catholic Church was speaking up for the Spanish fascists' and McShane had 'four debates with H.W.Henderson around 1936.' H.W. also wrote the pamphlet: What Are Russia's Ultimate Aims? published by himself, printed by Burns of Buccleuch Street, the company that did much of the printing work for Roman Catholic affairs and publications.

the union and became a Scottish Executive Officer. Ian Clark was a really intense person and also a dedicated body-builder, he reached fourth place in the British section of the Mr Universe championship. His experience in the union lead him to resign from the Party in the 1950s and then unfortunately at an early age he took a brain tumour and died, leaving a young wife and family.

But the most dominant member of the Party in John Brown's was big Tommy Stewart. He took his responsibilities very seriously and never shirked any fight on behalf of the workers. He was a riveter with the black squad, a giant of a man with the rugged strong features of a Slav or a Pole. He was also a very simple sort of man and when he spoke he was gentle and persuasive, never raised his voice in anger. His knowledge was extensive and even outside of the CP he was always regarded as an honest man. I got to know him quite well because after a short term of membership, like I said, I was put in charge of literature and propaganda in the group.

For years the 'black squad' – the platers, riveters, caulkers and hole-borers – had dominated the official trade union structure within the yard. It was no secret that most trade union representatives and Shop Stewards had to be Free Masons. As this was also the case on the management side it made for a very cosy relationship, and it led to a conflict of interest when it came to defending and improving working conditions. Tommy Stewart told me he had joined the Masonic Order when he was a young man and no doubt would die as one. When I attended Tommy's funeral many years later the only tribute paid to him came from the Communist Party. I found it sad, prominent people in the Labour Movement were conspicuous by their absence, it only seemed to be the remaining stalwarts of the local branch that were in attendance.

At the factory-gate meetings in those days we could get nearly a hundred workers to listen to our speakers, particularly if we had somebody that was a well-known figure in the working class movement. But most of our speakers came from inside the yard and we were fortunate in having people like big Tommy Stewart, Bob McLennan and Arnold Henderson. I was in charge of meetings so I had to chalk the streets, help out with the platform, collect the literature from the Party shop. We also distributed pamphlets, sold the *Daily Worker* and the *Challenge* , and then we gave out forms to possible recruits to the Party.

We always managed to get some leading figures from the Party, like John Gollan who was the Scottish Secretary at that time.[60] We had Alex Moffat of the Scottish miners, brother of Abe Moffat, the Chairman.[61] I very nearly got the famous Arthur Horner[62] who became the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers to speak at the factory gate. I heard him speak one Sunday at the St Andrew's Hall in Glasgow and he was the best I ever heard. With his Welsh lilt he could bring tears to your eyes when he spoke about the conditions miners had to endure, and bring anger in your heart when this was compared to the absent pit-owners who lived in splendour on the backs of the miners.

I chaired most of these meetings, one reason being that I was usually the only guy there on time. Of course the fact that I had quite a loud voice did help and on a few occasions it came in very handy because we could not afford a public address system. I remember one time we had just started a meeting when a crowd of Salvation Army supporters, complete with their band, marched into the street and stood across the road from us. They started to sing

[60] 'I had a suspicion that [John] Gollan wanted me out of the Glasgow secretaryship. . . ' [McShane 236]

[61] Alex Moffat (1904-67), brother of Abe Moffat who was Leader of the NUM. Alex was involved in the Hunger Marches. On the famous one to Edinburgh in June 1933 he was a member of the deputation that met with government officials. See Harry McShane's *Three Days that shook Edinburgh* (1933, reprinted AK Press 1994).

[62] Arthur Horner (1894-1968) a founder member of the CPGB was also involved in the 1930s Hunger Marches. On the 24th February at Cardiff Assizes. . . well-known miners' militant leader Arthur Horner was sentenced to fifteen months' hard labour. . . Horner was negotiating with the authorities [to prevent the eviction of a miner's family when] later, to the astonishment of the Rhondda workers, Horner and twenty-eight well-known militant unemployed miners of Mardy were arrested [and] charged with riotous bevahiour. . . The police evidence. . . was of the most astounding nature. . . [see Wal Hannington's *Unemployed Struggles*]
'On one occasion someone remarked how strange it was that the comrades who did the mass work were always being awkward on the party's leading committees. The reference was to Wal Hannington, Arthur Horner and myself, and it was true – we were all heretics. . .' [p215 McShane].

hymns and play their drums. My loud voice proved invaluable as the speaker was a wee Asian member and his voice was quite soft and high-pitched. When the band stopped playing and he started speaking it was no contest. We got our meeting finished and as I was folding up the platfrom him and the Salvation Army captain, who was a woman, came up to me and apologised for interrupting our meeting. She then said to me, 'You are a very clear and loud speaker, have you ever considered joining the Salvation Army?'

At first I thought genuinely she was joking, then I saw they were both quite serious. She gave me a card to contact them, although I never saw them back again at Brown's gate. On another occasion as I was putting the collection and literature cash in my tin a wee guy I knew from the Calton came up to me and said 'I enjoyed your speech.' Then he looked at the money in the tin and said, 'Aye you must be doing alright.' The usual proceeds never exceeded fifteen shillings or at the most a £1. I just smiled and walked away.

THROUGHOUT the world the fight against fascism had been led by the Communist Party. They had watched the world powers re-arming Germany and Italy, and had seen them retreat from Fascist aggression in Spain, Abysinnia and China. They were foremost in forming the International Brigade that fought in Spain and called for collective action to oppose German, Italian and Japanese aggression. So when Britain declared war in September 1939 people assumed that this at long last was a fight against fascism.

But things were not as simple as that. During the early years the CP was opposed to it, they called it 'a capitalist war'. Yet some of the leadership were in favour, like Harry Pollitt[63] and Pater Kerrigan,[64] also Willie Gallacher the Communist MP[65] who had

[63] Harry Pollitt (1890-1960); 'entered a cotton mill at 12 and joined the ILP at 16, shop steward at 21, Secretary of the Naional Minority Movement 1924-1929. . .imprisoned for seditious libel 1925. . . deported from Belfast 1933.' McShane 'found [Pollitt] a very likeable decent human being'. It was Pollitt wrote the article at the centre of the 'Campbell Case' [see note below]. He remained General Secretary of the CPGB from 1929 right through until 1956 and Chairman from then until the year he died [see his autobiography, *Serving My Time* 1940]. At the turn of the 21st century the Labour Government revealed that Pollitt's secretary of ten years had been working against him on behalf of British Intelligence.

[64] Peter Kerrigan (1899-1977) member of the CPGB executive 1927-29 and then from 1931 to 1965, held the posts of Scottish Secretary, National Organiser and Industrial Organiser; also involved in the organisation of the Hunger Marches. In *Voices from the Hunger Marches* Volume 1, Finlay Hart describes 'big Peter' as 'very strait-laced and very sort of disciplined.' [His] presence on an unemployed demonstration was part of the CP policy of 'showing the face of the party'. For the NUWM that meant bringing well-known Communist Party members into the agitation alongside those of us who always worked there. Kerrigan came to a meeting at the labour exchange and urged the crowd to join 'the party of Lenin and Stalin'. I objected to this. I said it was not a party meeting but an NUWM one, and

come out and hailed Chamberlain's declaration. But the actual policy of the Communist Party of this period was not to offer support. The Soviet Union's Foreign Minister, Molotov, signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. Pollitt was then General Secretary of the Party but he resigned and went back to industry as a boilermaker. J. R. Cambell returned as the Scottish organiser, he had been involved with the infamous Zinoviev letter during the 1924 election.[66] Eventually Molotov was to sign the Treaty of Alliance with Britain in 1942. Much later Kruschev called him 'a saboteur of peace' and in 1957 sent him as ambassador to Outer Mongolia.

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that we had always recruited to the party through building the NUWM as a united front of all unemployed workers. . . Kerrigan then attacked me for attacking the Communist Party. [McShane p210]

[65] Willie Gallacher (1881-1965), first and only Communist MP. See his autobiography. Even as a young man his reputation extended beyond the Paisley and Glasgow boundaries. His name is still capable of producing violent reactions in some quarters. 'Yes,' said Trotsky in 1938, in a letter to Emrys Hughes, Labour MP for South Ayrshire. 'I remember that Mr Gallacher was made immortal in 'Infantile Sickness of the Left'. Times have changed, however, and now he should be mentioned in the 'Senile Sickness of the Right'. See Raymond Ross *Trotsky Among the Scots*. In this essay Ross 'explores Leon Trotsky's connections with Scotland through his unpublished correspondence with Emrys Hughes. The essay was published in *Cencrastus 28* and the unpublished correspondence between Hughes and Trotsky lies in the National Library of Scotland.

[66] The 'Zinoviev Letter' of 1924. The counterfeit letter was addressed to J.R.Campbell, secretary of the CPGB. The other two whose signatures had been forged were Harry Pollitt and Arthur McManus. 'One of the most notorious intelligence scandals of the twentieth century. . . appeared on the eve of the 1924 general election. . . purportedly from Grigori Zinoviev, the head of the Soviet Union's international propaganda section, Comintern. . .' *Independent* 23/6/2000. 'Papers released to the Public Records Office at Kew show how the head of MI6 in the 1950s. . . authorised the destruction of important files relating to the scandal.' Although the Zinoviev Letter 'was blamed for bringing down the first Labour Government the Labour Government of 2000 agreed with the permanent British State that some of these papers are still too sensitive to be revealed to the British public.'

After Harry Pollitt had gone the Party-line was espoused by Palme Dutt, editor of the *Labour Monthly*, and the new General Secretary.[67] At a by-election being held in the Vale of Leven the Party put up a Peace Candidate, a journalist called Malcolm McEwan who spoke at John Brown's gate (I was to meet him a few years later at a by-election in the Gorbals). There were over three hundred Party members in John Brown's yard at this time and our policy was guarded opposition to the war. So my first political activity as a new Communist was advancing the call for a People's Peace for negotiations with Germany and Hitler.

During the course of my activities in the yard I would get involved in heated arguments about countries I knew very little about. However I was an avid reader and spent every night expanding my knowledge. I was attending lectures on Marxism and getting through two or three books a week, starting to build up my own library.

But it was a difficult time for a novice like me, having to defend policies like the Soviet Union's invasion of Finland, a small country that scarcely seemed capable of threatening such a mighty power. Then the invasion of Poland had also to be justified. I remember working down the bottom of a gun-turret and spending over two hours arguing with a Catholic worker. It was only stopped when I caught a glancing blow from a rivet, thrown by somebody who disagreed in particular with me. I needed four stitches from the Western Infirmary. That was my first real baptism into the fight to defend the Party-line.

On the industrial front, with the growth of the Clyde Shop Stewards and the Clyde Apprentices Committee, it was felt that the time had come to tackle long-standing grievances. We had no hesitation in downing tools to defend working conditions, even although we were accused of stabbing our soliders in the back. We were building up the Party membership and strengthening the Shop Stewards' committee in the six departments. I remember the management under the EWO set up so-called workers' councils in the yard, comprising six representatives from the workforce and

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[67] Palme Dutt 'became the new secretary of the Party [after] Pollitt and Campbell had been removed from the leadership [following] a complete turn-about in the Communist Party's policy. . .' [McShane p232]

six from the management, all chosen by themselves. Then they posted up the names of the workers' delegates still without any consultation with the workers. The official Shop Stewards demanded an election and nominated six names against the managements' selection. When the vote was taken it was a wipe-out for the names put forward by the employers and an overwhelming endorsement for the Shop Stewards. Every one of the six they put forward was elected by an overwhelming majority.

This meant we could now get the management to discuss items they use to insist were the sole function of management. For the first time we got a say in absenteeism and could prevent cases of that and bad-timekeeping from finishing up at Dumbarton Sheriff Court. Despite the goverment's war-time measure of freezing wages, but not profits, we could raise the questions of extra payments. We could insist that every safety-measure was examined and improved, and no change in working conditions could be introduced without union approval.

It also meant a larger number of apprentices in the welding department and the need to allow dilution, with a crash course on welding being carried out in the platers' shed. But despite the efforts of the management and the Boilermakers' Shop Stewards, not many riveters, hole-borers or caukers crossed over. As a matter of fact most of the dilutees seemed to be plumbers like myself. Then of course most plumbers had some experience as welders even if it had been with acetylene.

The biggest strike that took place at that time was the apprentices' strike (1941) and it was the best organised I ever saw.[68]

[68] The anthology *Workers City* has the essay 'Clyde Apprentices' Strikes' by Sandy Hobbs, who tells us that 'In some ways, the 1941 strike was the most dramatic one of [the apprentices' strikes on the Clyde]. Not only did it coincide with the Clydebank Blitz, but it was the biggest dispute to affect the munitions' industry in the whole of the Second World War. . . ' In another essay from *Workers City* Robert Lynn discusses another apprentices' strike, that of 1943-44, when he was serving his time as an apprentice engineer in Yarrows. On this occasion 'the Communist Party opposed the strike because Russia was by that time into the war on the side of the Allies. Their opposition alienated me and numerous other young people.' [See *Not a Life, Just a Leaf from it.*] Of that new turn-

The Clyde Apprentices Committee was a rank and file organisation that had been campaigning on the scandal of apprentices' wage rates for a long time. Everybody knew that for years the apprentices were regarded as a source of cheap labour. Now for the first time many of them had joined the union and could raise the issue in their branches.

Apart from the scandalous wages virtually no training was given to them by the employers, it really depended on the tradesman the boy got as a mate and in most cases they were left to their own devices. If the apprentices wished technical qualifications they had to enrol in an evening school and attend for the full term, although during the war most classes were suspended. And then if they worked in John Brown's the average week was a full seven days plus overtime, so it was next to impossible anyway. Even in the last year of their apprenticeships some young guys were lucky if they got 30/- (£1.50) a week. The average wage for a journeyman not on piece-work at that time would have been about £5. Overtime was an absolute necessity. Nobody worked less than 52 hours and the normal working week was seven days long including Tuesday and Thursday nights late till 8 pm, while the Sunday shift was 9 till 5 pm.

The Clyde Apprentices Committee had delegates from all the leading shipyards, from John Brown's to Fairfields in the upper reaches on the Clyde to Denny's at Dumbarton, right down to Lithgow's at Port Glasgow. They unanimously recommended that all apprentices down tools and take strike action in pursuance of a long overdue increase in wages and improvement in conditions. Within a short time every yard, factory and engineering establishment that employed apprentices was strike-bound. Then it was extended throughout Scotland. Within days it had spread to the north of England. There were at least 15,000 apprentices on

around in policy Harry McShane says that 'from July 1942 the CP entirely supported war production [and was] in favour of increasing capitalist production [and] didn't support strikes. . . [236] By the end of the war the. . . Party was completely tied up in supporting the Coalition Government's policies [and] demanded the continuation of a National Government including 'progressive' Tories like Churchill and Eden [which] was an amazing suggestion [because] Churchill had always been the villain of the socialist movement.' [238]